TRUE STORY
CLASSICS

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The audience couldn't see the blazing light in his eyes as he bade me farewell in the balcony scene. That was for me, alone.
(*Page 9.*)

TRUE STORY CLASSICS

Volume
XI

NEW YORK
MACFADDEN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
1929

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By MACFADDEN PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
In the United States, Canada and Great Britain

Printed in the United States of America

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True Story Classics

I

Coils of Infatuation

OOKING back, it's a bit difficult to remember at just what point my distaste, almost amounting to hatred, for Leo Carrington changed to liking and admiration, but I do know definitely the period in which that dynamic personality succeeded in its charm of wholely fascinating me. It was on the occasion of the last play of my senior high school year, when his marvelous "Romeo" gave ample proof of his budding genius. But to get back——

My father gave vent to one of his few really democratic moments when he decided his daughter should go to the public high school in Minneapolis. Rather a strange thing for him to have done, considering the type of child I was. Why, you've no idea how aloof, how reserved, I was! And capricious! Both my parents bowed before my slightest wish. Not that we were terribly wealthy, but Father was a doctor of excellent standing in the community, and our house was one of the largest and showiest in an exclusive suburb. My friends had been carefully chosen by a discriminating mother who had the usual ideas of the upbringing of an only child. I was allowed to have my own

way, and I chose to wall myself in. Not that I was one inch a snob; on the contrary, but shy—very shy.

We had a well-stocked library, and by the time I had reached the age of fifteen the adventurous novels of Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas were known to me thoroughly.

Yes, I was a dreamer. No one knew the daring deeds of gallantry and romance of which I thought hourly. What a surprise it would have been to them all, who thought me quiet to the point of dullness. In that state, I was sent to the high school, knowing little or nothing of human beings as they really were. My life to that point had been lived in a secret, fragrant garden.

It is utterly impossible to describe the repulsion I had for Leo when I first saw him, and became aware that he would be a member of my classes, a more or less constant sight for four years. Poor kid! At that period he was indeed pathetic with his thin, worn suit, unkempt hair always in his eyes, those defiant eyes which later enslaved me. You couldn't possibly condescend to him, though, for even then his square cut, determined jaw and the way he carried himself gave to his obvious poverty a glorious air.

Well, he didn't bother us much. Our select little circle of the "better" boys and girls soon formed, and he was cut out of everything. Yet between him and myself there was a strong personal feeling from the very first. We glared our hatred at each other and made good use of every opportunity to hurt one another. That was before either of us knew our similar ambition in the world of dramatics.

The theater! I cannot remember the time when it was not my goal. I dreamed of the day when I would be a great actress, courted by all the world. School was good for that. There, I was allowed to develop that talent, and talent I certainly had. Don't think I'm boasting. Subsequent events proved the fact. By the third school year, I had the distinction of being the general leading lady. After

one attempt to try to make my family understand how I felt about it, I gave it all up, and realized that I could expect no support from my father at least. What a storm he raised at the mere mention of my going on the stage! Mother became pale, but said nothing. I was forbidden by Father to mention the subject ever again. Now I can see his point of view thoroughly. At the age of sixteen, I must have appeared utterly unfit to cope with the hardships of that life. Awkwardly tall and thin I was, with a Raphael-like face and fluffy golden hair. Perhaps his opposition would have killed that ambition, had it not been for Roy Weylin, my English teacher. He was a personality, in startling contrast to the people I had known all my life. For him, Minneapolis was slow death. Yet he had no money, and had been glad enough to accept the post of teacher in the high school. He took a personal interest in me, and because of our mutual affection for long, careless strolls, we spent much time together. By the hour, he would talk to me of foreign places—of Paris, of London with its fogs and old, old charm. Yes, he had lived, and to him I confided all my latent ambitions. He approved absolutely.

"You should cut the traces of this town, Muriel," he advised once. "People here don't understand you, and you will never be satisfied with what Minneapolis has to offer."

I respected his opinion deeply, for to me he represented all the sophistication in the world. One day we came near to quarreling. It was the occasion on which he said:

"Your snobbish circle probably doesn't know he exists, but there is one boy in that class who will go very far, who has genius, if I am any judge, and that is Leo Carrington."

For a moment I was too amazed to speak, but finding my tongue, I favored the subject with ridicule. He—a genius! It was downright funny. In spite of that fact, I had a natural curiosity to know more. This was news indeed, for I had never guessed that Roy saw anything of Leo outside

of the classroom. He had, though. There were afternoons when he had invited the strangely quiet young boy to his rooms, and after a long siege had managed to gain his friendship. When Roy went on to explain that Leo Carrington was interested in the theater and would be a great actor some day, I was still more amazed. I had never thought of the unkempt, despised creature as possessing any such ambition. We argued about it for a long time that day, the one and only occasion on which it was discussed by us at all. However, from that period I regarded the strange youth in a new light.

Three school years had passed. Summer vacation had come again, and during our sojourn in a near-by, picturesque resort, I "grew up." Yes, for two months I tasted the joys of being a young lady, with hair done up, and heels heightened. There were early dances, "boy and girl" fun, all of it. Now, I think it very curious that it all seemed terribly boring to me. Other girls I knew were developing "crushes," but for me the boys of our crowd were just prosaic "boys." I could scarcely wait to get back to school; it would be the last year, the senior year—and I was on tiptoe to have it over with, for ahead loomed New York—the theater!

So many things happened during that last year that it seems hopelessly confused to me. I shall never forget, for instance, my astonishment in the change of Leo. Whatever he had been doing during the vacation months I don't know, but he returned to school a very handsome young man, clothed in a well-cut suit, obviously quite new, and accessories in keeping. His hair was brushed back tightly, giving him a clean-cut look he had lacked so utterly. Even his manner was different. The air of defiance had vanished. Not that he went out of his way to be friendly with any of us, but he went quietly about his business, never bothering to be rebellious, never seeming to know any of us were

alive. But it wasn't until Roy Weylin, in the tryouts for *Romeo,* cast him in that part, that his real popularity began. Evelyn Seymour was the first to take him up, and she was important. People accepted at the Seymour home were always welcomed elsewhere. I passed through a curious phase of hating the world—hating Roy for having given him the part, inasmuch as I was playing "Juliet" and would have to rehearse with him—hating Leo for having changed into such a charming young man. Oh, it was just a fit of bad temper, I guess. I had no reason to resent Leo. He had stopped trying to annoy me in any way. Although we met daily at rehearsals, he never tried to speak a word to me that was not in reference to the play.

Then one day, something happened. It had been raining steadily; the classrooms were drearier than usual and things went wrong. I hadn't been sleeping well and there was a dull beating pain at the back of my head, anything but pleasant. I felt far away and people about me, even friends with whom I talked and laughed, seemed remote, miles away. After English class, Roy called me to his desk.

"Muriel, I don't like that extreme pallor. What is it? Are you working too hard on that part?" He looked very concerned, and I must admit that flattered me.

"Oh, I suppose I am, Mr. Weylin, but I love it so!"

"How do you and Leo Carrington get on?" His voice was nonchalant, coldly conversational and indifferent, which was peculiar, considering how he had always teased me about my "snobbishness" in relation to that person with great amusement.

I replied with utter sincerity, "Very well indeed, Mr. Weylin. He is very nice. I was quite wrong about him, particularly when I laughed at the idea of his being an actor. He has ability, and his talent for hard work is infinite. We rehearse for hours and hours and he never murmurs. It's always I who call the halt."

There was silence for a minute. I observed him looking at me in a strangely penetrating manner.

"What's the matter with that reply?" I asked, with a smile.

He jerked himself together suddenly and said:

"Of course I think it's great, Muriel, that you are getting on so well together. The play would be a fizzle without that coöperation between you, but I feel I should warn you not to get too fond of that boy. He's not your sort."

I was too amazed to speak. I, Muriel Odell, get fond, really fond of a boy like Leo Carrington? Why, it was funny, just plain funny! As an actor I admired him greatly, but as a person, why, of course, he was impossible. I laughed at Roy's admonition and called him silly, but he was very grave when he said:

"You're too young, Muriel, to realize the force of that young man. He is like a torrent in embryo, and once knowing him, you won't easily forget about him. I don't believe you should even admire him overly much for his acting ability, for after all that's a big step forward from the hatred and contempt you used to feel for him."

I was angry. He had made a mistake in using the argument that I was young and too unsophisticated to protect myself. All my independence arose in revolt against his patronizing tone.

"After all, Mr. Weylin," I replied frigidly, "whether or not I like Mr. Carrington, and how much, would seem to me to be entirely my own affair. Kindly remember that."

Suddenly he was standing very close, facing me, his eyes blazing with a strange new light. He grasped my wrists so tightly it hurt.

"It's a great deal of my affair, do you hear? I love you —love you—love you! Oh, how I've wanted to say it. How hard it's been not to tell you, and now you've dragged it out of me."

We were alone in the classroom. School was over for the day, and, I remembered with panicky swiftness that but few people could be in the building at this time. This individual, who was so utterly foreign to the Roy Weylin I had known, frightened me completely. I cried out with the pain his grasp was inflicting upon my wrists, and begged to be released, but he seemed not to hear. On he went, talking as if a flood had suddenly been let loose——

"I've tried to think my attitude was protective, impersonally so, as an elder person might feel toward a child, but now I know better. You are not a child, Muriel. You are a girl, with the maturity of a woman intellectually, and that's the way I love you—as a man loves the woman he wants to be his mate. I'm jealous, madly jealous of every thought you give anyone else."

I couldn't get away, so tight was I held by him. I winced with pain, and suddenly, as if sanity had returned in the twinkling of an eye, he let go and, turning abruptly, walked to the window where he stood for a long time contemplating the monotonous downpour. There was no other sound in the room. What held me rooted to the spot? I was free to go, yet I did not move. It was a moment of awakening for me. There could be no doubt of Roy's sincerity. This was no child's play, this love of his for me. No, this was the kind that caused battles to be fought, humans to be slain, that twisted the soul, and made the body writhe in agony. I stood irresolute. What could I do? My own attitude was too perfectly plain. He could sense that I did not love him in the slightest.

At last, he turned and spoke in his habitually quiet tone:

"Don't be alarmed, dear child. I forgot myself completely for a minute, but I promise it shall not happen again. You don't love me in the slightest and of course I know that. Only don't deny me your friendship. This companionship has come to mean so much to me."

I walked over to him and put my hand timidly on his shoulder.

"Why, of course, Roy! We shall always be friends."

How relieved he looked! "I think that's the thing that made me love you, Muriel. For all your tender years, you are so much wiser than any of us. I shall always be devoted to you, and remember, I swear to keep that promise always. Never again shall a word of love pass my lips. The knowledge that I can go right on seeing you, sharing your confidences, is enough. I must go now."

It was at this point I became aware of another presence, and turning quickly faced Leo Carrington. He was standing quietly, questioningly, and I wondered how long he had been there. He began, diffidently:

"I hope I'm not intruding. You'll remember I promised to go over that scene with you this afternoon, Miss Odell."

Yes, I remembered well enough, and felt thankful for the interruption. Roy excused himself, and we were left alone. Whatever Leo may have thought, whatever he had heard, he was sensible enough to conceal. We commenced concentrating on the play and it was then I felt the reaction from the intense nervous strain I had just endured. Leo was speaking, but his voice was getting more faint, until the room became suddenly black. How he revived me, I do not know, but with returning consciousness, I found myself in his arms. He was holding me so tenderly and stroking my head. The first time I had ever been held in the arms of a man! The hot blood surged into my cheeks. For a second, I was tempted to remain thus forever. How strong those arms were! Then came the realization that I was being weak and silly. I felt ashamed and stood up hastily. He was all solicitude. Rehearsal was abandoned for that day.

Far into the hours of the night that followed I lay sleepless, thinking not of Roy and of how fine he was, but ting-

ling in every fiber at the memory of the emotion aroused in me by that contact with Leo. From that time on, I fought against a growing desire to see him constantly, to look into his dark eyes. Almost subconscious these desires were, for as yet one part of me still thought of Leo as the arrogant rowdy he had been. Yet something within me which had until then lain dormant was thoroughly awakened.

The school term was drawing to a close. Rehearsals continued, and I spent at least two hours of every day with Leo. Sometimes he called at my home. It was easy justifying that step to myself. The library was a delightful, quiet place in which to work out difficult scenes. I will say this for both of us. We did work hard to create perfect characterizations. Not a minute was wasted on irrelevant things.

Roy and I now talked more seriously of my future. What could be done? He knew as I did that my father would take active measures to prevent my going to New York. Of course I could run away, but that seemed a terrible thing to do, in view of the fact that my parents were the best in the world and I had no desire to hurt them.

Spring was in the air once more. Tiny green buds were on the trees and the lawns of the stately houses of our suburbs showed signs of life. The atmosphere was gay with promise. On a night of late May, we gave the performance of the play on which so many weary hours had been spent. I know the audience was prejudiced in our favor, being composed entirely of friends and relatives. However, that doesn't apply to Leo. I daresay no one there was the least interested in him, yet at the end of his first scene he had swept them all out of themselves. What a handsome, lithe figure he was, and what a passionately intense voice he had, so incomparably suited to create the living image of an ideal lover. But they—why, they couldn't see the blazing light in his eyes as he bade me farewell in the balcony scene——

"Parting is such sweet sorrow——"

That was for me alone. Then I knew why Roy had talked of him as a "force," a "torrent in embryo." I felt the power he could very easily gain over me and became afraid. How strange that independent me should be shrinking with such a fear! Yet he had usurped my dreams. I found myself thinking of him continually, and my heart beat more quickly, as if in anticipation of something which was going to happen. I forced myself to avoid Leo. There was no longer any reason for our meeting, since the play was now a thing of the past. He was being invited everywhere, and girls were falling in love with him right and left. My own problems were too pressing just then to allow me much time for parties and fun. I was studying hard, and spending much time with Roy. We simply had to decide something about my future. A girl cannot lose much time if she hopes to make a career in the theater. She needs the aid of youth and whatever good looks may be consequent thereupon. As for the average man—well, he is quite all right if he reaches the pinnacle by thirty-eight or forty. A woman is well on the decline by then, unless she has gained a tremendous reputation. I wanted to get started, for I knew there were years of hard work ahead.

Roy solved the problem conclusively by advising that I take my mother into my confidence. At first I doubted the advisability of this step, since it was quite probable she would object much more strenuously than Dad. But one afternoon, in a fit of hopelessness, I sobbed out to her my misery.

"I've simply got to get away, Mother. It's no good Father's trying to stop me. If you won't help me, I shall manage it somehow, but I don't want to hurt you, if possible."

I think she realized for the first time that day that it was no mere child's dream. We talked it over for hours, and

when finally she left me, it was with the promise of her assistance. We agreed on one point. I must run away without Father's knowledge. She would explain it all after I had gone. What a brick of a mother! Out of her own money, she intended to supply me with the necessary cash until I had a firm footing.

School was over at last. My little group of friends dispersed. Evelyn Seymour was being taken abroad by her mother. Just before she left, they "threw a party," in farewell. That party! Roy was to take me and I sat at my dressing table, applying the final touches, when Mother came into the room. It was a magic evening, warm, but with a slight enough breeze to make the heat pleasant, and already in the faintly darkening sky a huge moon became evident. Early July, it was. She told me that Dad was leaving for a near-by town the following week. He would be gone two days. Our chance to get me out of the way was at hand! We sat planning and planning, forgetting pretty much about the party in the new excitement. Mother, once having made up her mind to help me, was obtaining a great deal of fun out of the situation. Occasionally her face would cloud. It was when she thought of me away off there, with no one——

She went below to entertain Roy, who had been waiting some time. When I finally descended, the sound of their voices reached me. They seemed unusually gay. What could the fuss be about? Certainly my imminent departure hadn't caused such a rumpus. Entering the room, I saw Mother's face simply radiating happiness.

I soon learned the cause. Roy, in his quiet, unobtrusive way, had been writing. Without saying a word to anyone, he had completed a novel of middle-western life in a large city. Brayton, a well-known publisher, had just written from New York, highly praising the work, and signifying his willingness to publish it at an early date. How wonder-

ful for Roy! I realized what that moment must mean to him after years of waiting. He was brilliant, and it thrilled me to know he had turned that brilliance to good account.

Mother's particular happiness arose from the fact that he had planned to reside permanently in New York, and had offered to act as chaperon to me.

You've no idea how the prospect relieved her. I, too, was delighted, but not for her reason. Roy would be an inspiration. When the road got rocky, it would be wonderful having him near by, to talk things over with.

We arrived at the Seymours' home very late. The evening's promise of enchantment had been fulfilled in the deepening night. The moon made not daylight, but fairy light. I felt in a strange, inexplicable mood. Suddenly reckless and care free. My blood was warm. I wanted to dance and dance and dance. Roy was a marvelous escort. He looked decidedly distinguished in evening clothes, and the new happiness made him ten years younger. I decided he couldn't be much above thirty-two. Then I saw Leo. My heart almost stopped beating, then commenced at twice its ordinary speed. He looked like a Greek god—tall, handsome, compelling! Evelyn Seymour was dancing with him, and you could tell she was fathoms deep in love. Why, the way she raised her eyes to meet his was enough. My emotions were in a turmoil. I tried to believe that those small-town flirtations could mean nothing to me, that Leo, and everyone else in Minneapolis, would soon be a part of my past, with no part in my future. But I knew it was not the case. At times, I had wondered what he thought of me. Our relations had been so strange. First, downright hatred, then a gradual merging into recognition of his rights to acquaintanceship, if for no other reason, for his budding ability as an actor. Never had I admitted to myself that Leo could ever be my friend, but in spite of myself, he had become my dream lover. Successfully shutting thoughts and sights of

him out of my everyday life had not prevented his presence in the long, dark hours of the night. That look in his eyes —why, it haunted me!

I had a strange shock at the thought of his falling in love with, well, Evelyn Seymour, for instance. Probably he would end by marrying the best girl in town. His sort usually did. The music stopped. My partner and I walked toward the balcony overlooking the garden.

"Might I have the next dance, Miss Odell?"

I turned quickly, to acknowledge Leo's bow—and nod assent. Why should the blood rush to my cheeks at the prospect of dancing with him? Had I not danced with loads of boys?

We were gliding together over the smooth floor, saying not a word to each other. I felt intoxicated, dizzy. He held me tightly, and once I glanced up, almost involuntarily. Yes, he was looking at me in a way that made me thrill with happiness and fear at the same time. The music had stopped. Without a word, we walked out of the long French window into the garden, into the enchantment of its thousand scents, and blossoms made curiously unreal by the light of the moon. Still we had said not a word. When we reached the little summerhouse at the far end of the garden, where, on beautiful sunlit afternoons, Mrs. Seymour was wont to serve tea, he took me in his arms, and I felt his lips upon mine. In that instant I knew how long, subconsciously, I had been waiting for that moment. Why, I must have been in love with him all the time. I was mad, stark mad with happiness, and responded yearningly to his kisses. How long we stayed there I don't know. The world had stopped for us. In all that time, we had not said a word. Just before returning to the house, Leo kissed me for the last time, and afterwards, lifting my chin in his hand in order that he could look deeply into my eyes, he said:

"I've worshiped you all my life."

Many years afterwards, Roy told me that he watched for my return to the ballroom, waited a long time, and when I did come in finally, I seemed transfigured, as if a candle had been lighted in my soul.

At any rate, that was how I felt at the time. It was not until I thought it over calmly the following day that my first doubts assailed me. Here I was on the verge of going away, to live a life utterly foreign to that which had been, and right at the last, I had fallen head over heels in love. Only one desire remained. That was to see Leo again, to feel his lips upon mine.

You know my type of girl. The aloof kind who scares most boys off with her nose stuck up in the air. You know that when we fall, we fall hard. I was under a spell. Mother noticed that something was wrong. I evinced no enthusiasm over the shopping expeditions she had planned. She said nothing. Roy called that afternoon. He was unusually silent, but otherwise gave no indication. To the bottom of my soul I felt that he knew and thoroughly disapproved. For that reason, my instinct was to avoid him.

Leo called that evening. Mother had gone out and Father was busy in his study, so we had the library to ourselves. We were in each other's arms again. That was all that mattered.

"Do you know the years, dearest, when I have watched you from afar, and tried to believe I hated you because you were so much of a goddess? You have been so distant, so much the golden ideal to me, that I cannot believe you are here in my arms, about to become my wife."

His wife! I sat up with a start. Indeed, that angle had never occurred to me. Why, we simply couldn't be married. In the first place, we were both kids. I was eighteen, and he —he couldn't have been more than twenty. Hesitantly, I tried to explain, to make this all clear to him. No, he couldn't see any reason for delay. We loved each other, we

both wanted to go on the stage. What could be more perfect?

For hours, I tried to get him to listen to reason. A marriage at that age might be fatal. It was no use. He stopped my mouth with kisses, and effectively silenced my protests.

Two more nights of the same thing! I couldn't get him to take me seriously. At last, the day before I was to leave for New York, I realized I would have to betray the little secret which Mother, myself and Roy had been so carefully guarding. He was shocked. The idea of my going off to New York by myself was utterly repellent.

"Why, you cannot do it, darling! You don't know what a rough life it is. Let me pave the way. Promise to wait here at home for me. I have an engagement to tour the West with a cheap company this fall. Gradually I will make my way, then I will be able to introduce you to producers."

I simply couldn't make him understand that I wanted to get ahead on my own. That night we had our first quarrel, and I discovered he still retained the coarseness which had once been so evident. He became sulky. While in his presence, I felt too hurt and angry to betray much emotion, but alone in my room afterwards, I broke down pitifully. Had I lost him? Would he ever come near me again? He had said that all was over. Far into the night I sat by the open window in my room, turning the problem over in my mind. Well did I know that to marry him and throw to the winds all the carefully laid plans for my own career would be the height of folly. Yet it would take every ounce of courage I possessed for me to board that train the following day, without seeing him again. I fought with myself during the early watches of the morning, and with the dawn came the strength I needed. I would go. If he did not love me enough to wait for the time when marriage would be possible for us, well—it would be a tragedy then to have loved him at all.

Mother, seeing my pale, set face, was apprehensive of my going. She feared I was ill, and it took not a little acting to smile and assure her as best I could that I had never felt better. Two minutes before time for the train to leave a man came rushing frantically toward me. It was Leo. My heart sank. I felt I couldn't bear to reiterate all that had been said the previous day. He took me in his arms, there on the public platform, while bystanders stared curiously and Mother looked positively horrified.

"Darling," he said, unsteadily, "you really mustn't go. I cannot live without you. I love you. Don't take seriously all those things I said yesterday."

My self-control was breaking. In another minute it would have vanished completely.

"All aboard! All aboard!"

I turned and fled from him, running up the steps of the car, the tears streaming down my cheeks, as the train pulled out slowly. Not one glance did I bestow upon the city which was within view for the last time for many moons, in all probability. The whole trip was miserable. Now that the step was taken, I felt I would have sacrificed anything to be back with Leo, in his arms once again. It was torture to have found love, only to lose it. Never did it occur to me to blame him for his unreasonable attitude! The days on the train gave me a good opportunity to think the thing over sanely. I realized that Leo was temperamental, and possessed of a most unreasonable temper. When he had a chance to cool down, he would undoubtedly see the reasonableness of my course. I would have a letter from him, apologizing for his attitude, and swearing eternal fidelity. For never did it occur to me that we could be parted. I had given my love to him. No matter how unworthy I had once thought him, every ounce of my heart was now in his keeping.

I realized now that I had no notion of what Leo was

really like. His family, or normal habits of life, were entirely unknown to me. The only times I had seen him intimately were during the rehearsals of *Romeo and Juliet.* I knew him as a lover, but as a man—no.

So I argued with myself in blissful ignorance of the true facts, and by the time the train was steaming along the bank of the Hudson, unfolding at every mile beauties which were breath-taking, I was happy once more, optimistic that it all amounted to nothing more than a tempest in a teacup, the usual lovers' quarrel. In my mind I visualized the burning phrases he would employ in that letter. My first love letter, it would be.

The great terminal station! Never will I forget my first view of it, its spaciousness filled to overflowing with madly rushing humanity. Everything was new and strange. Luckily, I had the name of a hotel of which Mother knew. Some friend of hers stayed there once. Two days later a letter came from Mother. It was short, very sweet and loving. No allusion was made to the scene at the station before my departure. I had a vague premonition that she was withholding something—some important piece of news that would make a difference to me.

DEAREST DAUGHTER:

This is a sort of welcome to New York. How I wish I could have been there to receive you, instead of having to stay behind, and try very hard not to miss you. Everything in that great city is utterly fascinating, and nothing will be more so than Broadway, to you. Write me, and tell me that you are happy. There is no news from here. Your father is still at C——, so I haven't broken the news to him yet. I am forwarding a copy of the ——. There is a paragraph about your departure.

I shall write more to-morrow. Please, darling, write immediately, that I may know you are well and happy.

Why was there no word from Leo? Surely, oh surely, he must know how I was suffering. His temper had had ample time to subside. I could see no reason for his silence. As I said, my knowledge of his character was vague. I had no conception of how terribly stubborn he was. Bitterly have I learned it.

The newspaper contained nothing of interest. I glanced carelessly over the first page headlines, and then looked about for the article on my departure. The usual thing. One of the town's younger daughters gone to the great metropolis to make a name for herself. Godspeed! Just the usual bunk, but it did cheer me up. Then I noticed another article. At first I couldn't believe my eyes.

"Seymour-Carrington Engagement"

The paper shook in my hands. A great faintness seized me, but I set my teeth, and grimly commenced to read:

"Mr. and Mrs. Dale Seymour announce the engagement of their daughter, Evelyn Marian, to Leopold James Carrington.

"People who know the young couple will not be surprised by this piece of news, as they have been going about together a great deal."

On and on it went—explaining what a prominent person Leo was going to be; how the town took great pride in having produced such a handsome, popular young man who would one day represent it on the stage of a great metropolis. I had stopped reading. My hands still held the paper. I felt frozen—or at least I felt nothing at all but a definite

numbness. Even my brain was paralyzed. I could not think. It was inconceivable, but it had happened. The one person who made living worth while had betrayed me. Had he been laughing at me all the time? He had been in love with Evelyn when he held me in his arms and whispered those words of passionate adoration. Still, that didn't explain his having rushed down to the train in a frantic attempt to prevent my going. I was broken. Nothing seemed worth living for. The theater—why, it meant nothing. Leo had betrayed me—and my pride was very great, greater even than my wounded love. I, the proudest girl in Minneapolis, had been tricked by a common rowdy. I, who held myself so dear, had given my love freely, and in return had received jeering laughter.

Noises of the city came to me faintly, as the far-off roar of a giant. The whole truth of my tremendous aloneness smote me suddenly. I was afraid, now that my spirit was broken. Why had I come? What would there be ahead but long years of hard work? I think I was partially insane that night with the shock of it all. It never occurred to me that Leo might have got himself engaged in a fit of spite. No, to me it was too sacred a step to be taken for any reason other than love. I walked about the tiny room like a caged animal, trying not to escape bodily, but to escape from thoughts, memories which were driving me mad.

I picked up the paper again. It had for me the fascination of an evil thing. One of the headlines caught my eye.

"Girl Found Dead in Hotel Room"

Well, why not? Perhaps she was someone like myself. She knew how to love so much that nothing else mattered. Death—why, it was pleasant to think upon. Not hard to do, either—just run a hot bath, and cut some arteries in the wrist. Cut. What did people cut with? A knife, of

course. I had one, a tiny one which came with the fittings of my hand bag. Dazedly, I dragged out the bag. Yes, there was the little blade, shining and dazzling. Remember, I didn't feel crazy. I simply felt unreal, as if I were standing off somewhere outside of myself. Nothing seemed more natural than to end it all. I felt no fear.

Walking to the bathroom, I ran in a tub of hot water. My eyes saw nothing but the tiny knife which lay upon the table at my side, its blade glistening, as if to say:

"Look at me. I'm very efficient."

Slowly I picked it up, and walked toward the bathroom. My mind in that instant was an utter blank. Only one thing did I remember. That was that by keeping my arm under the water I would avoid pain in some degree.

Suddenly out of the uncanny silence the telephone rang. Something in me snapped. I shook myself, as if emerging from a horrible nightmare. What had I been about to do? I tried to reach the telephone, but swayed and fell in a dead faint. There Roy Weylin found me.

Five years pass very quickly in New York, especially when one is devoting every ounce of energy in the pursuit of illusive fame. At least I had the satisfaction of knowing that, at the end of that period, I was well on the road to it. But where would I have been without Roy? Thinking back, it seemed as if he had done everything.

During that long illness, that attack of brain fever, he had been by my side every minute. It was he who summoned Mother and who, after her return to Minneapolis, promised to see that I was protected from every enemy draught. I remember so well, his withholding the letter from Leo until I was strong enough so that it could not cause a relapse. Not that anything could have hurt me, after that one stunning blow, but of course, he didn't know that. The letter had no effect upon me. Its eloquent protestations of undying devotion were meaningless. I remem-

ber wondering vaguely why he had written it. Surely he must know that news of his engagement had reached me.

Autumn in New York, returning health, and with it a growing desire for the theater! It was precious like rebirth. Leo Carrington, my love for him, and the pain subsequent thereon—all that I put forcibly from my mind. It seemed as if I had grown very old during that illness. Such a thing as light, youthful laughter appeared to me to belong irrevocably to the past. How little we know of the ease with which the deepest wounds heal.

Walks with Roy—teas at his studio! Oh, yes, he was a personality in New York. His first book had been a success. The whole country was reading him and the comments of the press were enthusiastic. Money began coming his way, and what a change it had wrought in him! No, he didn't become snobbish and "high-hat," but he did gain a poise, a certain self-assurance which success imparts. How becoming it was! I felt a thrill of pride, just to walk by his side down the Avenue. There was so definitely an "air" about him.

Gradual friendships were made with the most interesting people of the city. They all gathered at Roy's studio. It was through him I first met Joseph Quinn, the producer who has since become so great. Never shall I forget the thrill of playing that first small part. Perhaps no great triumph of the future will ever afford me one-tenth as much joy. Certainly no first night will ever be as intoxicating. Joseph Quinn—that strange genius whose unconventional behavior was continually causing all sorts of weird gossip! He was dependent upon women for inspiration, I know, and in his queer way fancied himself in love with some.

I was one of many. During the period in which he fancied himself at my feet, he devoted much time to me, and he alone I have to thank for teaching me whatever I may know now about acting.

Native ability? Why, that is only one-tenth of the battle. There are thousands of tricks—subtle ways of getting a point "over," of which I should never have dreamed. Yes, it was necessary to be able in your own mind to "create" a character, but it is far more necessary to know how to deliver that creation intact to your audience, and it is no easy feat. Everyone knows, of course, what Quinn made of his wife. No one ever heard of Jean Ellison before she married him. And now——

Never will I forget the pride I took in my first week's salary. It was pitifully small, all things considered, but it was a "little theater" group and the play was produced on the coöperative basis.

Thirty-five dollars a week! Yes, and I lived on it, very comfortably. There were loads of young people who had no more than I—and what nice parties we used to have, viewing the "high-browest" plays from the gallery, or eating sandwiches and coffee at a counter. It was a lark, every bit of it, and in sharp contrast were the occasions when Roy took me to a smart hotel for dinner, and afterwards to the theater, seating me with great ceremony in the eighth row, orchestra. Always the eighth row!

Summers in stock—the hardest work in the world! Yet I hadn't minded one bit. No labor is unpleasant when one loves it and I certainly liked every minute I spent perfecting my own poor ability.

And through it all, I had a trustworthy friend at my elbow, ever ready to help me over the rough places. I should never have obtained those earlier engagements for small parts without his help. Personal introductions to producers do mean so much. Never once had he forgotten that vow he had made to me in the classroom on that far-away afternoon. In fact, I felt pretty certain he must have forgotten all about it. Surely, there wasn't the slightest indication in the way he treated me that he was in love with me.

I never heard further from Leo after that one letter. At times, nights when the moon shone with particular brilliance, or when the scent of flowers was wafted to me on the breeze, memories of those few moments of enchantment returned to stab me. But hard work is good for one who wants to forget, and I did, believe me! At first, it was just fighting for life, but later, it became pleasant.

Five years isn't really very long, you know. I was twenty-three, and on the verge of playing one of the biggest parts of my career. Roy had introduced me to Rosovsky, a famous Russian producer who had been imported to direct one of the important plays of the season. I knew the play, and it contained a part which I knew was meant for me. There was a great deal too much "wire-pulling," but I got a contract to play a rôle, at a salary of three hundred and fifty dollars a week. What a huge sum it appeared to me then!

"Wait a few years," laughed Roy. "You will be considering that pin money."

I asked Rosovsky about the leading man. Someone by the name of Warren Millman was to have the part. It was new to me. I followed Broadway news very closely and had never noticed Mr. Millman's name in any of the casts.

"Some new boy they've picked up in the West," he informed me by way of explanation. "I hear he is what you Americans would call a 'wow!'"

Clearly do I recall the talk which Roy gave me the evening previous to the commencement of rehearsals of the play. He told me I was showing signs of promise in the theater, that my technique was improving all the time.

"But," he added darkly, "something is vitally wrong, and unless you remedy it, you are very apt to be a flop. You can't be an actress who drives an audience wild with enthusiasm when you have no fire. Ever since that little event five years ago you have been going about with your

lips drawn tight and your soul walled up. It won't do. Fall in love with somebody, Muriel. You've got to snap out of it."

That caused me to think a little. Yes, I had been going around like a corpse on legs, and I knew it could ruin me. But the very word "love" made my blood run cold. One experience like that, at an early age, often ends in complete abhorrence of the subject. However——

The following morning I motored down to the Rowan Theater. The stage was lighted, but no one appeared to be in sight. I walked about a bit, and was considering leaving for a stroll about the block when a voice from the blackness, which was the auditorium, shouted——

"Muriel!"

I stood stock still, moved to stone. Yes, I knew that voice. It awakened chords which I had believed were dead. Leo Carrington! What was he doing here? He was on the stage beside me in an instant.

"Muriel! It is you, isn't it? After all these years! I can scarcely believe it."

Just the same as ever! Handsome, tall, lithe. My eyes noted quickly the old flash of fire in his, the quick, nervous gestures of those sensitive fingers. I managed to stammer at last:

"Why—why, what are you doing here?"

He told me—and then I nearly fainted. Never had it occurred to me that the "find" of whom I had heard so much, might be Leo. He confessed that his proper name wasn't good for the stage, and with the license afforded to that profession, he had changed it.

"And your wife," I asked, feeling the warm flush in my cheeks as I spoke.

"Haven't any such animal. You knew I wouldn't marry. That was an engagement to spite you for going off and leaving me. Evelyn was a good kid but not my class."

Had he always been so coarse, so arrogant, or was that the result of years of touring in second-class theatrical companies? How beastly of him to have dropped Evelyn! She undoubtedly had suffered terribly. I realized how thoroughly selfish, callous this man was, and the prospect of continued rehearsals with him was almost unbearable. But the theater makes such demands of its devotees.

Roy looked positively horrified when he heard the news. He went dead white, and then a flush of anger mounted his cheeks. Even he couldn't say what he was angry about. It occurred to me in that moment that I really knew very little of what went on in his mind. His suffering, his deep emotions, he kept very much to himself.

Well, you know what happened? As much as I despised the second-rate individual that Leo had become, it wasn't long before I was again under his spell. I cried aloud at the torture of desiring so that individual I hated. Yes, I had grown wise enough to realize just what my feeling was for Leo.

Things went along fairly smoothly for the first three weeks. He never tried to make any advances, for the simple reason that I snubbed him completely. My attitude of "keep away" was painfully clear.

Then, the last hectic week, when we were all in the grip of nervous excitement, we—meaning Roy and I—ran into Leo at one of Joseph Quinn's parties. It was late, well after two. No one felt in the least like going to bed, and the very devil himself must have been in my blood that night, for I accepted Leo's suggestion that we three go to his apartment in order that we might act for Roy one of the big love scenes in the last act. It was a crazy thing to do, in the mood in which I was—but, well I guess for once something in me had let loose. I just didn't care.

The apartment was just what I should have expected of Leo. All the modern equipment, small rooms, stock fur-

niture, and no atmosphere. It might have been copied from an illustration in a magazine. We had coffee and some rare liquor called "Izarra" or something, made by the Basques in their mountain seclusion. It was very pleasant for me, but I'm afraid the two men weren't enjoying themselves particularly. For their sakes, I did most of the talking and endeavored to cheer things up a bit. Roy was silent to the point of rudeness, which annoyed me frightfully.

Then we did our famous scene for him, the one which afterwards won for us round upon round of applause from crowded houses.

I sat upon a chaise longue, reading, as the script directed. Leo made his entrance, whereupon I stood up quickly, letting the book fall to the floor. He walked the length of the room, coming straight to me, towering above me, as he had done every day for the past three weeks, but that moment I felt a thrill at his nearness.

"You were playing with me last night." (His first line.)

"Gene, you're being a silly little boy again. Of course I wasn't."

"You said you loved me. Oh, yes, you wound about us a glittering net of words, whose wonder would have melted the heart of any poet, but I'm a lover! Why, oh why must you pose, Caroline? For one minute could you possibly be a woman?"

"When you're tempestuous, Gene, I simply cannot stand it. Besides, one doesn't talk of love at tea time."

You'll gather, from that, what a bored, sophisticated person I was to portray. What followed was more startling by contrast. The playwright had directed that he, suddenly overcome by her beauty, kiss her, not just a peck on the cheek or lips, but the sweeping caress of a man utterly overcome by emotion. I looked at Leo, and found him gazing at me, eagerly, burningly. Without another word, he took me in his arms, and bending me far back so he could look

deeply into my eyes, kissed me; his arms about me tightened until I could scarcely breathe. We had forgotten the play, the theater, everything— How had I ever lived without him? What did it matter what he was when every bit of me cried out for his love?

A door closing broke the spell and with it came realization of what we had done. Roy! Present and having to witness that! My knees became weak; I trembled from sheer humiliation. What would he think of me now—this man who had been my closest friend?

The curious thing about it was that in my earnestness to impress upon Leo just how I felt about hurting Roy, I succeeded only in making him think me in love with the man. We were both suffering a reaction from that divine moment, I guess; anyway, it ended in a quarrel, and I rushed from the apartment on the wings of anger. So swift was my progress that I almost stumbled over someone standing just outside the entrance of the house. As I turned to make the usual murmur of apology, I found myself face to face with Roy. He smiled in a funny, strained way which cut me to the heart.

"You seem to be in a tremendous hurry, Muriel. I came down to smoke a cigarette in the open air for a minute."

At his generosity in making it easy for me to act as if nothing had happened, something in me snapped. The tears streamed down my cheeks. We were in a taxicab—and he was drying my eyes with a huge pocket handkerchief exactly as if I were five years old. We went to his apartment, although it was nearly morning, and not exactly an hour at which young ladies visited bachelor apartments. However, with Roy I didn't think a thing about it.

Entering that huge, lovely living room, after the bandboxy quality of the one we had just left, was quieting. What exquisite taste he had shown in selecting furnishings which harmonized perfectly with its stately proportions! I

sank back in one of the huge chairs and found myself immediately happy. Sounds of preparation for breakfast reached me from the kitchenette.

"Roy!" I called to him. "Would you be surprised to hear I'm all right now?"

He came to the door of the living room, coffee tin in one hand, a huge spoon in the other, looking so ludicrously unlike himself that I howled with glee.

"Of course, I shouldn't," he said, after joining in the laugh on himself. "You are always 'all right' in this room. It makes you happy, doesn't it, infant—just its atmosphere?"

Yes, that was it. I felt much more myself, more calm and able to face things, while sitting in this haven of quiet, surrounded by mellowed things.

I fell asleep, or at least I suppose I must have been asleep, for the very next moment it seemed sunlight was streaming in. Had I been dreaming, too, of a lover who kissed my hair as it fell about my shoulders—and my eyes and lips? There was something strange about it, for I knew my lover was not Leo—and upon awakening, my hair was down! I sat bolt upright.

"Roy, however did my hair get loosened?"

He told me, in his usual straightforward manner. I had been stirring restlessly and he had made the discovery that the coil of hair at the nape of my neck was bothering me, so very deftly he had loosened it.

"The reason I asked, old dear," I amended by way of explanation, "was that I had a dream about its being down, and it seemed funny, waking up to find it a reality."

He started pacing about the room, nervously, and then said:

"While I am about it, I may as well confess that I kissed you. It was too irresistible, seeing you there sleeping so beautifully with the sunlight of early morning making each

little hair golden. I believe even your mother would have pardoned me, had she been here."

"Roy, you funny child, don't be fussed about it. I dreamed that, too, so I couldn't have been dreaming at all, but half awake. Now let's not talk about it any more."

At the moment I looked at him, and on his pale face were such marks of suffering as had never been visible before; he came over and stood beside me, and spoke in a quick, nervous way:

"It's no good, my dear. I give up the ghost for once and for all. This must be the last time we see each other, for I'm madly in love with you and it is just about killing me, particularly when I realize how hopeless it is. You mustn't worry about it. I don't want you to waste another thought upon me. You are in love with Leo, more so than ever. I could see it in your eyes last night when you kissed him, but I simply cannot stand watching you give to someone else that which I would sell my soul to have."

I felt stunned. Not to see Roy any more? Why, it was unthinkable! He had become part of my life. Yet, I couldn't love him that way. Leo had been given that kind of love by me, and I was a "one man woman." Roy would have had every right to reproach me, for I had been selfish, taking all he had to offer in the nature of devotion, and returning to him nothing. I felt as if I were drowning, and clung to him, asking that he give me time to think it over. He was agreeable to that, but added that my decision would have to be final in every respect.

"You haven't one inkling of the terrible restraint I have shown," he told me. "At this minute I want so much to take you in my arms and keep you there forever, that the pain of not doing so is driving me crazy. Perhaps I need your help, much more than you need mine."

With such a weight on my mind did I drag through the last few days of rehearsal, until the opening night. Roy

had kept away, as we had agreed, and Leo, when we had met at the theater, had been sulky. I felt badly the need of support, and missed the friend who had always been there to give encouragement to me when I needed it. Somehow I felt I would never get through that first performance on which so much depended, without his help. So I telephoned him and said I would agree to become engaged to him. We had a long talk that night, before leaving for the theater.

"Listen, darling," he whispered, his face radiant with joy, "believe me you will never regret this step. I know you are still in love with Leo, but it isn't real love. I hoped you would get over this crazy infatuation long before this, but now we will fight it together. Why, if you knew that man as he really is, you wouldn't let him kiss your hand. Sooner or later you would have learned his true character. Now I hope your ideals need not be completely shattered. Think of Leo as someone who once existed but has long since gone."

He was opening a small velvet box, which he had taken from a pocket of his dinner jacket. Seeing the contents, I stepped back, almost stumbled, in sheer amazement, for it was the most gorgeous emerald I had ever seen.

"It's not the conventional idea of an engagement ring, dear, but I wanted you to have something different, superlative of its sort, outstandingly so, as you are among women."

I was too overcome to speak. For the first time, I kissed him, putting all the gratitude I felt for his love and devotion into that caress. We talked for a long time, and he told me all about himself. I was astonished to learn he was only thirty-five.

"Life has been rough on me," he said with a rueful smile, "I feel much older and I am certain I look it."

Now I felt I could go to the theater and play as I had never played before—uplifted as I was by that scene with

one of the finest men in the world. I felt scarcely nervous while making up, and felt a thrill at the sound of the call boy's voice shouting through the corridors:

"Quarter after, please!"

The wonder of a first night! Life suddenly concentrates to one small point, that point being a particular theater where everything stands or falls. All about is tension, nerves strained to the breaking point. Yet, when the curtain at the Rowan finally rose on the first act, there we were behind the footlights living again scenes that had become so familiar they were now a part of ourselves. We played them as we had never played before. Leo Carrington! He was superb. I knew my performance was good. Never shall I forget the ovation which was accorded us. We took sixteen curtain calls!

Suddenly, there were crowds of people rushing at us back stage, showering congratulations, the word "success" on every tongue. A magic word that. My dressing room, when I finally reached it, panting for breath, was unrecognizable, so stacked was it with flowers. Everyone had remembered—the family back home, friends I had made in New York—orchids from Roy, roses from Joseph Quinn and his wife. I just sat down and cried my heart out.

There was a party afterwards, somewhere, given by someone; I've never learned whom. Roy was there, but I scarcely saw him. Leo and I, constantly thrown together, taking bows together—why, that one event had so completely overthrown everything that went before it, that my engagement was forgotten. I—Miss Odell—had been a success! In my first big part, I had made a hit, and with Leo. There was something about it which united us. There was no going to bed that night. At dawn, Leo and I accompanied Roy to his apartment to await there the delivery of the newspapers. Reading the notices would be such a thrill.

They were favorable, of course. Talked of me as a young actress who for the past few years had been showing great promise and who in the rôle of Sybel had more than justified all expectations. As for Leo, they called him the "biggest" find of the year. We were happy—oh, so happy! It wasn't until I awakened from an all day's sleep, to go to the theater again, that I remembered. I had promised to be Roy's wife! Could I do it? Marrying without love was dishonorable; he had hinted at shady sides to Leo's character. Perhaps. But that didn't stop me from loving him. However, I had given my promise and that meant keeping it.

He was forced to leave town for a few days, and during that time I saw Leo continually. There were supper parties of two nearly every evening. Success hadn't helped to make him any more charming. His head had become too swelled. But still, I loved being with him—was exhausted by the words of passionate intensity he whispered to me. Then one night, when I was liking him more than usual, we went dancing somewhere, and on the way home, stopped in his apartment for a drink. It sounds very disreputable, but people in the theater do those things without thinking a great deal about it. Not that they live more loosely than others, but that their mode of life calls for more freedom of conduct. At any rate, it never occurred to me that Leo might misunderstand.

We each had a highball, and then commenced talking, reminiscing about Minneapolis—things we had done there in the school days. I noticed that he was keeping his glass filled, but it never occurred to me how much he was drinking. Then he kissed me. There was a new masterfulness about it, a new possessiveness, as if he had said:

"You are mine! You belong to me!"

I wanted to struggle free of him, because some vague fear clutched at my heart. But something else responded to

those kisses. I found myself slipping. Then I remembered. I was engaged to Roy. This wasn't playing fair. I started to struggle to get free. His arms only pinned me more closely. Then I really became frightened. I cried out to him to free me, and beat upon his chest with my clenched fists, but to no avail! It was a hard fight, because I was struggling not only against him, but against myself. To have yielded would have been so easy. Where it all would have ended, I don't know, but suddenly we became aware of loud knocking at the door. There was no use pretending we weren't there, because I had been shouting loudly enough for the whole world to hear. Leo opened the door and I heard him give a short ejaculation of surprise.

Roy stood in the room.

My head swam. I became dizzy and would have fallen had he not caught me in his arms.

When I returned to consciousness, I was lying on the chaise longue in his apartment. How he got me there, I cannot imagine. I raised myself weakly on one elbow, and looked about for him. He stood with his back to me, gazing out of the window.

In that instant, I wanted to die. Everything was messed up and there was no denying the fact that it was all my own fault. Roy had played fair. Leo had only taken what was offered to men. No—I sat in judgment upon myself and found I was wanting. From sheer impotence, tears streamed down my cheeks. I wasn't feeling sorry for myself. Oh no, I had all that was coming to me, but that I had played so unfairly as to hurt the dearest friend I had in the world, that was humiliating! I wanted to go over to Roy, put my arms about him, and tell him how truly sorry I was, but what difference could that make to him now? He probably despised me from the bottom of his heart, and who could blame him?

Slowly I got up. It must have been very late, well after

three o'clock in the morning. My wrap lay on a chair. I gathered it, and started walking toward the door, wearily dragging my feet along. I tried the knob. It didn't move. The truth was finally borne in upon my numbed mind that the door was locked. I turned to Roy. He was still gazing out of the window.

"Roy," I called to him meekly, "I want to go now. There is nothing for me to say. I'm going home to sleep, and I hope to heaven you will forget all this. Of course I release you from your promise. That was all a mistake."

The emerald glittered upon my finger. With a sob, I tore off the ring and laid it on the table. He had turned at last. Never had I seen him looking just like that—white as a ghost and stern, oh so stern!

"You will do nothing of the sort," he began in a strange new, crisp voice. "Sit down where you were. I have no intention of letting you go."

Dazed by this new person, I obeyed. What was the matter with him? Couldn't he guess how terribly anxious I was to get away from that room, away from everything that would recall to me how frightfully I had wrecked my life for love? He said not another word, but continued to stand with his back to me while I took off the wrap and proceeded to make myself comfortable.

"Roy, why are you keeping me here?" I had to ask him. "Don't you see I want to run away and hide?"

"Of course you do," he replied in the same crisp way. "That's what you've been doing all your life—running away and hiding. Now you have got to face things. You have been making a fool of me long enough. I am through with all that. To-morrow you come with me, and we will get a marriage license and five minutes later we will be married at the Town Hall by the Clerk."

Married! Had he gone completely crazy? I had a momentary fear that he really was.

"Oh, yes," he answered my unspoken thoughts, "I know. You think I have gone batty. On the contrary, for the first time in many years, I'm perfectly sane. Your footstool has turned turtle and now you are going to pay. Tell me all you like about still being in love with Leo. If you are, you should be ashamed to admit it. Now realize this: Unless I have your sacred promise, I intend to keep you right here until we can go down to the Municipal Building."

My anger flared up then. How dared he talk to me that way? I had been wrong, perhaps, in many things, but I didn't deserve this harsh treatment. At first, I thought he was joking, and tried to pass the whole thing off lightly, but he made it clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he meant every word of it. I fought like a tiger, reviling him, stamping about, while he remained calm and collected, interrupting my hysterical pleadings only occasionally with some such comment as:

"That is all beside the point. What really matters is that I intend to make you face the music. You have had everything I possessed. Now you are going to make good. You should be ashamed of yourself, Muriel. I have warned you of the kind of person Leo Carrington is. Why, his reputation, personally, is terrible. If he makes convincing love to you, I have downright proof that he does the same with hundreds of other women. Your self-respect should have held you aloof from him, if nothing else."

Furiously I resented that attack on Leo's character, and not a word of it did I believe. I thought in that moment I saw Roy in the true light of a spiteful character. The things I said to him! Told him he wasn't half as much of a man as Leo, that I couldn't even think of kissing him—that he was downright repulsive to me.

Only now can I see what a fiery furnace that scene was to him. Years afterwards, he told me how nearly he came to weakening, but the dreadful need of remaining iron sus-

tained him. You know how sometimes a life-saver has to deal a knock-out blow in order to save a drowning person—well, that was what he was doing to me, although I had not the slightest suspicion of it at the time.

And in truth, he made me do it. No one else in the world knows the "inside story" of my sudden marriage to Roy, but it happened amazingly just as I have told it to you. I wouldn't give him my promise, so he kept me there all night. All my crying and pleading was in vain and at last, worn out from struggle, I fell asleep in the big chair.

In the light of day, I faced the issue more calmly. Roy looked haggard and worn. I guessed he hadn't had an ounce of rest. Breakfast was a silent affair. I was trying to think of some way to get word to Leo before taking the inevitable step. Oh well, what was the use? I just had to make up my mind to see things through, since Roy wished for it.

"I shan't fight any more, my dear," said I by way of surrender. "You seem to have adopted a most hair-raising manner of courtship suddenly, but I think I know you well enough to guess there is something in back of it all. I bow to superior wisdom."

He heaved a sigh of relief.

"Wise child! Can't you guess why I have acted thus? Last night, when I walked into that apartment, I saw suddenly that, left to yourself, you would go on sinking in the bog. You know I don't slander people promiscuously, and I tell you I have collected enough gossip about that man you are so in love with to know that while his manner of love-making is enviably theatrical, it lacks in sincerity what it gains in force. He is too fond of himself, too eager to get on to be very much in love with anyone. Your marrying me won't bother him very long."

I had a moment of resentment at the wholesale blackening of Leo, but again remembering how seldom Roy did or

said anything without sufficient reason, I held my peace. Events took their course. We were married at eleven o'clock that morning at the Municipal Building. The ceremony wasn't impressive, but we had fun studying the various couples waiting like ourselves to take the fatal step. Some looked like immigrants just arrived, while others had all the earmarks of wealth, and seemed a little ashamed of being there at all. Well, we were married, very simply and very quickly. Afterwards, we went to an uptown hotel for luncheon. Somehow, things seemed very much as always. I had difficulty in remembering I was now a wife.

We planned our future over that luncheon. I would have to go on with the play and there was every indication that it would enjoy a long run. However, Roy was on the verge of publishing his second book and wanted to remain in New York for another few months at any rate. The minute those two things were out of the way, we would sail for Europe, and combine honeymoon and holiday.

"This afternoon," he concluded, smiling, "I'm going to send my wife shopping. In apology for having rushed you so into this marriage, I want you to buy everything in sight. Don't mind if I'm not there, will you? I have to see my publishers about this blasted book. I shall read it to you in those long days of play ahead of us."

He was writing a check, which I took with a blush. How uncanny, and how rather nice it was, receiving money in that nonchalant style. It was for one thousand dollars. A wedding present to me. I gasped with pleasure.

It was an enchanted afternoon; all the important shops were visited. It wasn't until tea time that I thought of Leo. In one of those strange moods which assail us all on occasions, I felt I just had to see him. Oh, I can see now how thoroughly incorrigible I was. It is very hard for me to admit, even to myself, that I was once the person who did these things.

At the door of his apartment, I knocked timidly at first, then receiving no answer, more loudly. The door man had said he was at home. At last I heard his steps. The door was opened slowly, cautiously, displaying only the upper portion of his head about the side of it. At the sight of me, he looked more amazed than the occasion demanded.

I rushed past him, into the living room.

"I simply had to see you at once," I murmured hastily.

He continued to act in a funny, embarrassed manner. Never had I seen him so ill at ease. However, in spite of his peculiarly inhospitable air, tremblingly, I commenced to narrate the events of the past twelve hours. Suddenly with the effect of a thunderbolt, from the next room, a voice issued—a woman's voice——

"Leo, darling, where are you?"

For a moment he remained silent. Then, stammering rather badly, he called back:

"Talking to a friend. Just a minute, d-de-ar."

She appeared in the doorway, a tall, dark woman, handsome in a hard, cynical fashion. I think he started to introduce us or something, but I didn't wait. In one blinding flash, the true character of this man whom I had loved so long was revealed to me.

How often since then I have thanked God for allowing me to see with my own eyes that which I would probably never have believed at second-hand. You see, I had believed that Leo loved me. I still think he did, in his peculiar fashion, but I have realized that it was simply because he believed me to be far above him. Never in the world could I have been happy with him. There was never love for me in his heart, in the sense that a man loves the "only woman in the world," as my husband has since proved to me a man can love a woman.

I recognized then why Roy had forced our marriage. He knew I was so deeply infatuated I might do almost any-

thing, and saw how soon I would regret it. He has never learned of that visit of mine to Leo's apartment on our wedding day. There is no reason why he should know. And I have tried to make up to him any unhappiness I caused him before our marriage.

The play went on. Night after night Leo and I played together, but never again did he arouse in me the slightest spark of love. That had all died, a sharp, silent little death. He professed to be entirely broken up over my marriage, but I had learned that one gift he did have—and that was a talent for weaving spells with words—words which intrinsically meant nothing.

Life has been good to me, and looking back at the self-centered, headstrong girl I was, I shudder to think what it might have been like had I followed my own selfish impulses.

If this confession can make some girls realize the tremendous mistake of marrying a man simply because he is handsome, dashing, and sweeps them off their inexperienced feet with the passionate ardor of his love-making, then it has not been written in vain. That is my purpose, for I would like them all to know the true delights of real companionship, with the right man, the thing which grows and cements with the passing years until its beauty is incomparable. I would advise the Leo Carringtons of the world never to marry. He had the gift—still has, for that matter—of giving happiness, delight to thousands, through his art, but for the woman he would marry, would be nothing.

Think it over, girls.

II

Her Secret Terror

WE HAD never known wealth. But neither had we ever known less than comfort, until the finding of poor, old, easy-going Dad dead in his office brought Laura and me almost within sight of want.

We had lived all our lives in Vernon, a quiet, unhurried town where life flowed as smoothly as the river that divided it; was as pleasant as its wide, old, elm and maple-shaded streets, whose houses were dignified by deep lawns and beautiful gardens; where even the poor lived in comfort, compared to the poverty of great cities that I came to know later.

Dad was the principal lawyer of the town—had been for some forty years—and had an office on the main street, over a stationery shop, to which, having ascended by a flight of wooden steps worn shabby by the feet of the legally distressed, one entered a bare room once kalsomined a pale blue but now very much faded, like its ever-present occupant, Miss Sarah Hobbs, who had been with Dad more years than he, with his habitual chivalry, cared to mention.

Two doors led from this room. One, a very recent addition, into the office of Tom Parker, with whom I had gone to school and grown up and whom Dad had recently taken in as a partner; and the other into Dad's office.

But he was seldom to be found there, especially of late years, and since Tom's entry into the firm. He could generally be found sitting downstairs in the stationery shop, across the street in Ben Hooper's harness store, or up the street in front of Carson's Hotel, in a tilted-back chair, his

feet at a comfortable elevation, a cigar in his mouth, discussing politics, crops, horses, conditions; exchanging gossip, and declaiming law. And the town was quite used to the sight of Miss Hobbs mincing along on her high heels at all hours of the day in search of him.

She was devoted to him and believed him capable of anything, holding a book he had written on commercial law as the last word on the subject. And I believe she was right. It was a known fact that he knew more law than any lawyer or judge in that part of the country; but at his death his affairs were in a sad state.

During the last few years of his life he had speculated wildly and lost a comfortable fortune, the result of a lifetime's work.

Mother had died when I was twelve and Laura six; and I had been keeping house for six years, since leaving high school at seventeen. I had longed to go to college but had felt that it was my duty to take care of Dad and Laura whom I loved so dearly.

She was so sweet and dainty, with a thick mass of honey-colored hair, and a skin of apple blossom hue; with great, serious, dark blue eyes, at the bottom of whose deep wells Truth did indeed hide.

She had just finished high school and was looking forward to entering one of the eastern colleges in a couple of weeks, when Dad's death occurred.

When everything was finally settled—and what herculean labors Tom Parker performed to that end!—and we found we had only our home to call our own, Laura gave up the idea of college, and wanted to cancel the arrangements already made. But I would not hear of it. I had set my heart on her going; and go she should!

She begged and pleaded with me; cried and said she would not hear of it, when I unfolded my scheme to her. But for once I was obdurate. That delicate flower should

not be crushed under the heels of an indifferent world!

So I sold the house, furnished, to an engineer who was interested in a recent water power scheme near the town, for enough to put her through, though meagerly.

For myself, I was determined to seek work in New York. I had a good education, was an excellent typist—Dad had always kept a machine at home on which I had often done work for him—although I knew nothing of stenography.

Tom Parker offered to make a position for me in the office, hinting that it was time Miss Hobbs retired; but I would not hear of such a thing. Then he surprised me by proposing to me; and though I realized afterwards that I had done him an injustice, I could not help feeling then that perhaps he was moved by a feeling of pity for me, and loyalty to Dad, of whom he had been very fond. So, though I would have done so in any case, I refused him. He told me both offers would always be open to me, and made me promise, if I ever needed help, to let him know. The truth was I was eager to get out into the world to meet life and its adventures; nevertheless, Tom's generosity gave me a warm feeling of security in spite of my certainty that I would never make use of it.

I must pass quickly over the parting with our home and the parting of Laura and me, who had never been separated a day, for the pain of it all comes over me, with the old intensity, the old overwhelming sorrow: those days immediately preceding when we took the old walks, wandered about and about the dear garden under whose trees we had played, in whose nooks we had hidden, whose yellowing leaves and faded foliage seemed a mournful reminder of eternal change; that last night when we went together from room to room, taking leave of the old familiar things that had made the setting of our lives. Yet what was all that to our parting!

We traveled part way together, and Laura clung to me,

held my hand the whole time; and I—although I tried to be cheerful for her sake—felt almost physically sick at the thought of being without her. And for the first time I doubted the wisdom of what I had done: together we could have faced anything. And yet—she would be safe! That thought was my only comfort.

I arrived in New York early in the morning; a stranger in a new world. Yet immediately my spirits began to rise. It was one of those rarely beautiful days in early October when the blue of a cloudless sky is softened by that haze that hovers over the earth then like some mysterious veil wrapping the world in its etherealizing folds; when the trees in their state robes of scarlet and gold make a fête of death; when the cool, wine-like air sets the blood of youth leaping.

The streets were long, bright, shining paths of excitement and wonder to me; the stores, caves of enchantment; the traffic and noise and roar of the great city, the heartbeats of a world into which I had just been born. And I searched every face for something—perhaps only a reflection of my own joy. Yes, joy, in spite of the fact that I had parted only a few hours before from the being I loved most in the world. Youth is like that! The most resilient thing in the world. It can touch the depths in one plunge and snap back to the heights on the rebound.

I went without much difficulty straight to an address Tom had given me for a room. It was a street of high, narrow, stone-fronted houses, respectable enough, yet depressing, with most of the windows displaying discreetly the signs of lodgings to let, and undertakers, those grisly harbingers of a street's decay.

I secured a small back room, three flights up, containing a sagging, once white iron bed, a dressing table, small table and chair, and mat of carpet; but it smelled sweet, was clean and neat, and, best of all to me, had a tree outside its one

window and a good view of a narrow strip of sky. How often I watched it change from gold to rose, from rose to a purple that, fading, left a wistful green that deepened slowly into darkness! How often I sat gazing at it, comforted by the thought that the same gleaming stars looked down on both Laura and me.

That very same day I secured a position through a letter Tom had given me to a friend of his who was a public stenographer. Of course, I was greatly handicapped through not knowing shorthand, and Mr. Greene seemed doubtful at first; but after trying me at the typewriter he engaged me, though at a smaller salary than the others received. I determined to attend a night class at once where I could acquire the difficult seeming art.

I was amazed at the ease with which I had secured a niche for myself in that world that had seemed so distant as to be only a dream. Of course, Tom had made things easy for me. Not that they always remained so; my difficult times came.

Although it was so different, I soon became accustomed to the routine of my new life; and was far from unhappy.

I rose early, as I had always done, had my breakfast, which consisted of fruit, a cup of tea and a roll, in my room. I had come to an arrangement with my landlady to that end, and had bought an electric grill and a set of hanging shelves, whereon I kept such dishes and utensils as I needed. Gradually I added many more little comforts to my room, such as curtains, bedspread and some cushions, which I made myself of some pretty cretonne I had picked up at a bargain; another hanging shelf for my books; a table lamp with a pretty shade, which I also made; and, more precious than the rest, a wicker chair I had bought cheaply at a second-hand store in one of my interminable rambles.

It was the time after my breakfast, before I went to

work, that I loved most. The streets had such a sparkling freshness. I loved to watch the opening of the stores, the bustle of the awakening world to a new day. And as the streets never lost their interest for me, no matter what the weather, I never lost mine in the unending source of their life—the people. Such thousands and thousands, and all alike, yet each different, and indifferent to the other. I used to watch their faces and try to create their lives from what I read there. I made a game of seeing how many really happy faces I could find in a day—and it is surprising how few I found. And many a night I lay, unable to forget, and with real pain at my heart for the sorrow or despair I had seen in some face that day.

It was not that I had not plenty to think of and do otherwise, that I was so intrigued by the city's charm. I was busy from nine until half-past twelve, and from half-past one until six, in the office. And though the work itself was mechanical, I found it interesting because I had mostly manuscripts to type, and I learned to watch for style and workmanship, and to discriminate between the good and the bad; and it was interesting, too, to watch the reception they received from the world and to verify one's judgment.

Four nights a week I attended a class in stenography and in whatever spare time I had I practiced it. For amusement I had the city itself, and books. There were few amusements I could have afforded in any case.

Friends I had none. Not that I could not easily have made many, but I did not find the girls congenial in the office; and I had no opportunity to become acquainted with the type of man I wished to know—although I did meet casually, in the office, one or two of the men whose manuscripts I typed.

Laura I missed unceasingly, with a gnawing knowledge of something missing, with an aching loneliness; but she

was well and happy, and making good progress; and I felt sure, now, that I had done right.

And so the months slipped by and it was Christmas, and my darling and I had spent two of the happiest weeks of our lives together in my room and one I managed to procure for her on the same floor, which, by good fortune, happened to be vacant; then she was gone again, and winter melted into spring, which soon lost its freshness in summer's arden embrace—and the long holidays were there.

Laura had begged to come to me and to find work for the summer; but I insisted on her accepting an invitation from an old friend back home, whose daughter was Laura's roommate at college, to spend the summer with them, promising her that I would try to go back for a couple of weeks. But I never went.

I had made progress in that year. Since learning shorthand, my salary had been raised twice; and with the last raise I had been made chief assistant to Mr. Greene. Then, in August, he told me that he had accepted a post as court stenographer, and had sold the business to another stenographic service company which had its own staff.

He said he would recommend and do his best for me; and I know he did. But there was no opening for anyone with the new company, unless they turned an old employee away, a thing they naturally would not do.

So, toward the end of August, I found myself without work. I had saved some money, but had been more extravagant in buying some pretty things for Laura, which she sorely needed for the summer, than I might have been had I known I was going to lose my position. However, I had a little money, and no fear of not getting another position. That was, at first; but fear crept in with depression and disappointment as day after day passed and found me still answering advertisements, and my money dwindling.

And fear deepened when I saw the seemingly increasing

number of girls who were answering the advertisements.

I shudder yet when I think of those dreary outer offices where we waited, eying each other askance, fearing each other's ability; and the disappointment and dread that settled about the heart with an almost physical weight when we were all turned away.

I had always thought that it was only the incompetent, the poorly equipped, who were continually looking for work. But I knew myself to be a good stenographer, with a very fair education; and I saw then many others whom I judged to be equally able.

I practiced economy in every way, except one, that I could think of: I ate lightly in my own room; I did my own washing, and kept my clothes in as good order as possible; I walked everywhere that was at all within possible walking distance; but I could not bring myself to give up my room, which was just within the boundary of respectability, for a cheaper one in a poor district.

And yet I was brought to the point where I would have had to, when fortune suddenly favored me and I secured a position, though only for a couple of months. I did not relax in my economies in any way, continuing to live on a near starvation diet, only anxious to save against another period of want.

And it came. When the girl whose place I had secured through her illness recovered and returned, I commenced the old, dreary hunt with no better result.

I still walked about the streets and watched the people a great deal; and they still held me—but differently. I found fewer happy faces than ever. Sadness and misery, want and fear showed themselves to me everywhere; and I came to understand the great terror of the world—poverty—for I moved into the heart of its kingdom. I often wondered then if people saw its shadows in my face as I had so often seen it in the faces of others.

I was forced to give up my room, though Mrs. Hard, whose name was the only hard thing about her and who was a thin, little, stooped, worried-looking woman with the liability of a long, shambling, pale, pimply-faced son who never seemed to do anything, touched me by offering to take a chance on my paying her, for another month. But when I refused, for debt frightened me more than want and I still had enough to pay my way for a little while, she bought the things I had added to my room and assured me that any time I wanted to come back it would be ready for me, even if she had to turn out another tenant.

She taught me one of my first lessons in the knowledge I acquired of how the poor help the poor. Oh, do not think I did not find harshness, selfishness, brutality, callousness; but I came to know that it is really only the poor who, with understanding and sympathy out of their want, help each other.

My new room was in a shambling old tenement on a dirty, crowded street; and it was cold and dark and uninviting, with that quality that shows one's homeward footsteps. I always tried to shake off the feeling and look one acquires in such a neighborhood when emerging from it. I was thankful my clothes were still good, and even if not of the very latest style, were of a conservative cut that was good for some time. Dad had always been very generous to Laura and me.

Perhaps among all the miseries of the out-of-work, none weighs heavier than a way of passing the time. I answered advertisements by letter and in person; I wandered about, always with a certain amount of dread, and not without the reality a few times of being followed or accosted. I tried to study, but found it difficult to concentrate enough even to read; the faces of anxiety, fear, even terror, would intrude so often between the page and me.

It was at such a time, on a bitterly cold December night,

when I sat huddled in my coat as near the lukewarm radiator as I could get, staring at the faded, spotted wall paper, my book lying idle in my lap, that the idea came to me to try to write, to put into words, stories, the things I saw in faces; things I wondered and thought about.

I sat there for hours, thinking, a new avenue opening dimly before me. And the next day, half-doubtfully, half-excitedly, completely skeptical of its ultimate value, I began to write a story. And it grew on me as I continued so that I forgot my troubles, became fascinated by the play of words and ideas; surprised at the stream of ideas for more stories that flooded my mind as though loosened by a broken dam.

Fortunately I had a typewriter which I had rented by the week, as I had managed to get a very little typing to do at home through the stenography company where I had first worked; and when I had finished my story, with a feeling of buoyancy, of delight, at having achieved something that I felt really good, I typed it neatly and sent it to a magazine, though without really expecting it to be accepted. for by the time I had posted it my buoyancy and delight had abated considerably.

And I was not disappointed. Within two weeks of excited watching for the postman it came back. Perhaps there is nothing that will describe better the feeling of a young writer at the return of his first stories than a mother's feeling when she first begins to realize that the child she had idolized has feet of clay. In spite of my having been skeptical of its value and of its being accepted, I realized then that I had thought it very good.

And though my self-confidence diminished as I sent it to another magazine, and another, and many more, and each time it returned with a depressingly polite slip, the certainty that had been born in me that cold December night, that grew stronger in me as I encouraged it with more attempts

at stories, that I could and would write some day, did not die.

But my immediate concern was to get something to do in order to get enough to eat and pay my room rent, and to that end I followed up advertisements and haunted the offices of the Stenographic Service Company in the hope of getting work to do at home.

Laura knew nothing of my plight. My only comfort was the knowledge that she was safe. Before Christmas I had written her that I had to go away to another city as a special stenographer, and for her to go back home with May Dorsey for the holidays. I even managed, by selling some of my clothes, to send her a nice present.

She was terribly grieved that we could not be together, and I cried—I had not cried in all those months—for hours, when I got her letter and present on Christmas Eve. It was the end of the first month in my second period of idleness; and my despair and grief seemed to reach their apex on that day of terrible loneliness that I never recall yet without the old sense of depression creeping over me.

I believe the only thing that kept me from giving up and going back home was the knowledge that I could go. That sounds paradoxical, but it is true. I had set aside, almost in secret from myself, an amount of money that would take me back; and nothing induced me then, or in the months that followed—not even hunger, for I was often very hungry—to touch it. I believe I should have gone to pieces without the knowledge that I *could* go back.

That Christmas day, as I sat alone in my bleak room, weary with grief, almost envying the joy—like a rich, bright garment thrown over rags—in the homes of those about me, I visioned to myself such a return: to go back defeated, to spend the rest of my life in Father's old office, or as Tom Parker's wife. I would be safe, it was true; but I

would never be happy or even contented. No, I would struggle a little longer!

A little longer stretched itself into three months of interminable days. I got a little work from the Stenographic Service Company; once or twice I replaced somebody for a day or two, once for a week. I managed just to keep body and soul together.

Then one day toward the end of March, when the bright, pale sunshine was like a young child's laughter breaking the world's still expectancy of the awakening of spring, when the blue sky bent down like a charming lady in silk to peep at this world of shining streets and people more buoyantly alive, I made my way to the offices of the Stenographic Service Company with some manuscripts I had been typing for them.

Somehow, the brightness and life of the streets and people got into my blood. A kind of lightness of spirit came over me; hope, in spite of my knowledge of that betrayer, sang her siren song in my heart, and I listened, enchanted. Surely something wonderful would soon happen!

When I reached the office I felt in a glow as though my cheeks were bright and my eyes shining. I handed in the manuscripts, spoke to one or two whom I knew, and was just leaving when Mr. Adams, the manager, entered.

I smiled and bowed to him and he nodded absently, then seemed to hesitate in his stride through the outer office, and glancing at me again, came over to me.

"Will you come into my office a moment, Miss Douglass?" he said.

My heart beat quickly. Could something really be going to happen? I went with him and preceded him as he courteously held the door open for me. He asked me to be seated, and sat down himself, and stared at me appraisingly.

He was a middle-aged, rather stout, flabby man, but kindly looking. After a moment or two of silence, during

which he seemed to be thinking something out, he asked:

"Have you a position, Miss Douglass?"

I told him I had not.

"I have heard of something that might suit you," he went on, tapping his desk with a pencil, absently. "You have heard of Craig Farrell? Ah! I see you have. We do the typing of some of his manuscripts when he is without a secretary; and when he was in here the other day he asked me, if I happened to hear of a suitable secretary, to send her up. Er—you are experienced, Miss Douglass?"

I was trembling with eagerness and told him that I had been a year with Mr. Greene, and had become his chief assistant.

"Ah—I did not mean quite that," he said. "I know you are a good stenographer. I meant, have you tact, understanding, experience of the world?"

I stared at him, rather taken aback; then told him—and I found it difficult to keep the tremble out of my voice—I needed a post very badly, and would do my best.

His small, deep-sunken eyes regarded me keenly, and when I finished, he said: "Very well, if you need it, you must take it. Go in the morning between ten and twelve. Here is the address. And—I asked that last question solely for your sake, Miss Douglass." He rose, and I with him, and held out his hand. "Good-by and good luck."

If the streets were bright and cheerful before, they were paths of joy now, and Hope, my angel, beckoned me on. If only I could secure it! I tried to prevent myself from growing too sanguine. What had Mr. Adams meant by asking if I possessed tact, understanding, and experience of the world, and remarking that he asked the question for my sake? Why my sake? In order that I might be able to hold such a position? Private secretary to a popular author, a prolific writer of best sellers, whose name appeared in large type on the covers of the best magazines.

I went straight back to my room and practiced on my shorthand—in which I feared I might have grown rusty—for the rest of the afternoon. I also went over my clothes and mended and pressed what I should wear.

At half-past nine the next morning I stood before the clouded, cracked mirror of what passed for my dressing table, and regarded myself critically, my gaze traveling up from long, narrow feet and slender ankles, well-shod in patent leather and silk, over a slim, tall figure in a navy blue suit of excellent material, and cut just different enough to be individual, with the snowy Peter Pan blouse adding a note of girlishness, to my own face looking gravely back at me out of long, widely open gray eyes, heavily fringed with black, from under the shadow of wavy auburn hair crowned with a small black felt hat. I looked at myself as an acquaintance might after not having seen me for some time, and decided that my appearance would give no clew to what I had been through—what I had suffered in order to retain that one presentable outfit—though the oval of my face was thinner and my fine, clear, delicate skin—my one pride—had more of a pallor than was its wont.

I rode—wishing to arrive fresh and unworn looking—to the address Mr. Adams had given me, which was near the Park and proved to be a house of such pretentious appearance as to make me too nervous to approach it at once, dreading as I did to kill hope once again.

When I eventually ascended the stone steps and rang at the grilled iron and plate-glass door, I was admitted by a manservant, who led me through a splendid though rather gloomy hall into a small, bright reception room—what the English call a morning room—and requested me to wait.

And wait I did, growing more nervous every minute, until just as I was certain that the servant had forgotten me, and was wondering what I should do, he appeared again and asked me to follow him.

He led me once more through the hall, past a number of beautiful rooms, up a wonderful stairway which opened into the balcony that surrounded the hall below, and to a door at which he knocked.

I heard a rather lazy, though rich voice drawl, "Come in," and the servant held the door open for me to enter, closing it softly behind me.

I had never seen—nor have I since—such a splendid room. It was filled with expensive, rich and beautiful rugs, furniture and objects which I—little as I knew about such things then, and swift as was my inventory—knew to be rare and precious; yet it was roomy and spacious.

From behind a great, inlaid, glass-topped mahogany desk covered with papers a man rose as I came forward.

He was about thirty, very tall, with an elegant slenderness, or else the cut of his clothes gave him that appearance. His face was pale, with a very straight nose, such as I have seen in the paintings of the old Colonial aristocracy; and an arrogant, rather sensual mouth, with an obstinate chin jutting out beneath and thick black hair brushed shiningly back from an almost womanishly white forehead, from beneath which, with an almost startling quality, blue eyes looked out piercingly.

All this I saw as I crossed the room; but I have never, in all the time since, been able to analyze—as who may analyze anything so intangible?—his charm.

He seemed, with those penetrating eyes, to look into my very soul as I stood before him and told him why I had come; and I gazed back quietly, calmer now than I had been all morning.

When he asked me to be seated, I knew, though how I cannot say, that he had made up his mind to engage me; and a warm feeling of gladness went through me.

He asked me if I had ever done such work as he required before; and when I told him my experience with the

Stenographic Company, he said this was somewhat different, as usually he dictated his stories to his secretary and sometimes it meant very fast, tiring, and sometimes very slow, dragging work. As well, he wanted someone to see and keep people from bothering him. Then he tried my dictation and speed; and all the time I felt that these were only formalities, and when he finally said: "Well, Miss Douglass, I think you will suit me admirably. I would like you to come as soon as possible," that feeling of warmth at my heart was only intensified.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Douglass," he said as I was leaving the room, "may I ask where you live?"

There flashed through my mind the impossibility of giving him my present address, but as I turned slowly, determined to give him my old one, he said in that rich voice that already I could have distinguished among a hundred:

"Your father does not by any possibility work for Dodd-Parsons & Company, brokers, does he?"

"My father and mother are both dead, and I am alone in the city," I told him.

"Ah, indeed!" Something I couldn't define flashed in his eyes. "I believe I forgot to mention that your salary will be thirty-five dollars. At nine-thirty to-morrow, if you please, Miss Douglass."

Thirty-five dollars a week! And to work in such an atmosphere of beauty and refinement, for such a man! I felt as if I had been lifted from a dark, stagnant pit into sunshine so bright that it blinded me to many beauties that I yet felt were there.

I moved that night back to my old room, and felt as if I was home again after a long, unpleasant absence. And I had the strangest dream that night! I thought that Mr. Farrell was trying to kiss me; and though I struggled and struggled to free myself, I knew—with a secret joy—that I must yield; but when I did, and turned my face to him,

as he approached mine he suddenly became motionless, staring at me, then with a mocking laugh he turned his head aside and let me go; and my shame, humiliation and pain were almost unbearable.

When I awoke I was still so lost in the reality of my feeling that I forgot that this day held definite purpose for me; but my memory came like the flash of a jewel on the bright finger of sunshine that had crept through my blind.

It was such a joy to have a place again in that world I loved; to have somewhere to go as I walked through the streets; to be a part of the hurrying stream, not a piece of flotsam floating on its surface.

This time I did not hesitate to approach the house, and I walked through its hall and up its stairs with an assurance I would have thought impossible the day before.

I was shown to a small room next to Mr. Farrell's where there was a desk and typewriter. It was, in fact, a compact little office. At nine-thirty a bell rang, and I entered the other room.

He was as handsome as the day before, and I felt the blood rise in my cheeks as involuntarily I thought of my dream; and I realized with surprise what a perfect impression of him my mind had registered the day previous.

I was not nervous, and yet I found myself trembling a little as I sat down near him at his desk. It was as though he radiated something that sent me quivering like some delicate recording instrument.

But when he started to dictate I lost myself in my work. I found, with gladness, that I could follow his dictation fairly easily. It was not exactly rapid, though now and then passages came with a swiftness that reminded me of a mountain torrent finding a new way for itself, his words tumbling out as though to give shape to his thought before one should be lost.

Sometimes he got up and moved about, but for the most

part he sat, though not always in the same chair; and he seemed to look through things, or at them without seeing them, while he talked—unless he happened to look at me.

I noticed that first morning, and often as the weeks went on, that if his eyes rested on me they lost that look of seeing something entirely different and he faltered in his dictation; and, in spite of myself, my eyes would drop before his then.

At about twelve-thirty he relaxed with a sigh in a big chair facing me, where I sat at the desk.

He had white, slender, long-fingered hands whose nervous movements fascinated me, so that I followed them as he lighted a cigarette. Immediately he extinguished the match and handed me his case, with a quick apology.

"No wonder you look reproachful, but I—er—well, the truth is I hesitate about offering you one."

I laughed as I shook my head in refusal. "Do I look so very unsophisticated"

He regarded me leisurely. "Appearances are often misleading, you know," he drawled. "Now, look at me!"

I gazed at the length of him stretched out at ease, with his every movement the acme of grace. He was looking at me with an ironical expression from narrowed eyes, through a bluish smoke haze.

"Have you not received the impression already that I am a very energetic chap?"

"Well—" I hesitated slightly, "I believe you are, on occasion."

"What do you mean—*occasion?*" he demanded with mock severity.

"Why," I said, surprised at my own temerity, "you work when you work. But I should judge you to be quite lazy at other times."

He straightened up swiftly. "Jove! You've found me out already. You're a real little psychologist, aren't you?

Well, since it won't come as a shock to you, what do you say if we chuck work for the afternoon and go out into the country. At this time of the year it calls me irresistibly."

I was not only really surprised, but troubled how to answer. My first day to "chuck" work and go out with my employer! Still, he was my employer, and had a right to my time; and I could not dictate to him how to make use of it.

He watched me, the ironical expression deepening about his mouth and in his eyes. Presently he spoke:

"Oh, I assure you you need have no qualms about the propriety of such a proceeding. My former secretary accompanied me quite often. Call it part of your duties if you wish."

"I'll go, of course, if you wish," I said, still hesitantly.

"Not if it is going to be distasteful to you," he said a little coldly, with a hauteur that was natural to him and which I came to know well.

"Oh, I should love to go," I said, I am afraid a little too eagerly.

"Well, that's different. But why all the hesitation, my dear girl? If you want to get the best of life you must take advantage of all its openings, but ignore the thrusts of its rapier—conscience. Would you mind, my dear—" he saw my swift flush, and said gravely, yet with something in the tone of his voice that made me feel that he was secretly smiling at me, "I beg your pardon. Such a bad habit of mine. Will you kindly ring that bell on the desk?"

I did so, and the servant who had admitted me, entered almost at once.

"Hayes," his master ordered, "I want the smaller car in half an hour, and—er—my secretary, Miss Douglass, will have lunch with me."

"Yes, sir. I'll see to it, sir." And he bowed and withdrew.

I could not help marveling at the unexpectedness of life —at its swift surprises. The day before I had sat in a damp, cold, dreary room, the wail of a sick child in my ears, lunching on a stale roll and a glass of milk, with anxiety bordering on terror in my heart. To-day I was in a dream, in a sumptuous room, at a table where hothouse flowers and fruit vied with each other in a setting of satin napery and gleaming silver and glass, waited on by a deft and silent servant; with a rare and charming companion, and the prospect of a glorious afternoon before me.

Shall I ever forget that afternoon? April in one of her sunshiny, charming moods. We swung over the smooth roads in a long, low, gray car whose hum was no more insistent that the swift beating of my own joyous heart, between fields and rolling upland becoming tenderly green, in swift flight down steep hills, past patches of blue water where sunbeams danced like bright spirits on the crest of every tiny ripple.

And we drove mostly in silence. Once or twice I exclaimed or spoke from a glad heart, satisfied with the beauty it had hungered for. Once or twice he made some remark, turning to look at me, and accidentally touching me with his shoulder as he did so; and when this happened such a thrill shot through me as frightened me.

It was at tea which we had at a pretty place near a still lake on which the shadows lay clear and deep that I told him something of my life—not much. It was then that he asked me my name; and when I told him Isabelle, announced at once that he would call me Belle.

A young, plaintive moon had made its appearance in a pale green sky when we drove back through the quiet evening; and I was amazed to realize that I had known the man beside me for a day only. In some indefinably way he

had made me feel as though I had known him—I was going to say, forever. His charm was so intangible, so subtle, yet so insidious.

And it grew on me as the days passed until I became afraid. I dreaded the end of each day when I would have to leave him; welcomed the beginning of each new one that meant so many hours in his presence. I knew and treasured —would lie awake long hours, pondering—his every look, gesture, appearance. I came to resent the presence of women who dropped into the studio; to be jealous of their little familiarities.

He always included me in these impromptu studio teas, even often calling me from my work. In fact, he had never treated me as just his secretary.

He would burst into my room with: "Oh, give over, Belle, and let's go out somewhere. I feel one of my lazy spells coming on."

If I demurred, saying I must finish that day's work or get behind, he would march up to my desk, gather together my papers, put them in a drawer and lock it; and lifting me by the shoulders—and at his touch I was putty in his hands—march me out.

Or he would often stop in his dictation and say, as on that first morning, "I feel the country calling me. Let us get out, Belle, out into the quietness and beauty of the hills and fields. You're such a conscientious little thing. Surely you know those gray eyes were made for other things than dictation and typing."

And I would always yield to his persuasion. I knew I shouldn't. Something warned me I was preparing a way of pain for myself, but, after all, the mischief was done. I could never love him less—perhaps not even more.

June passed, and the summer matured, but Craig—it is so natural to me to call him that—was in the middle of a book for fall publication, so we worked right through; and

the second summer passed without my being able to spend any of it with Laura. I was disappointed, and yet I was glad. I could not bear the thought of not seeing Craig for weeks together.

September came, and with one of its days we finished the last chapter of the book. Craig, as always at the finish of a story, in an exultant mood, demanded a holiday.

"Come along, Belle," he ordered. "That troublesome conscience of yours must be at rest now. You've kept me at the treadmill like a little jailer. Now I must have a little freedom."

And I was glad to go. To sit beside him in the low, gray car, in swift flight. He was gay and brilliant, but his face was strangely pale, and his eyes so hotly bright when he turned them on me as to make mine drop before them.

We were in hilly country and suddenly, at the top of a very steep rise, something went wrong with the car so that Craig lost control of it. Never have I experienced anything like the descent of that hill. I was afraid—fearfully so; but I managed to keep control of myself—not to scream, or jump.

It seemed never-ending, yet was over in a minute. Near the bottom the car took the ditch, and that was all I remember.

With the return of consciousness, before I even opened my eyes, I felt Craig's kisses on my face, and heard his voice, low and deep and broken, calling to me in loving terms. I did not want to open my eyes. If I could only have died then!

When I did open them, I tried to struggle up, but he held me back, drew me closer to his breast, kissed my hair, murmured into it that he loved me, loved me—begged me to tell him that I was unhurt.

In a moment or two I freed myself; but although I felt weak, and shaken, I seemed to have entered another world—

such joy inundated my heart, engulfed me in its golden waves. I could not look at Craig, but I felt the warmth of his gaze penetrate my heart.

We had evidently been thrown clear of the car, which lay on its side in the ditch; but Craig seemed oblivious to it. He moved close to me, and said in that voice of his, whose quality set the chords of my heart trembling like the strings of a harp on which some soft, senuous wind played:

"Belle!"

And again, softer, as I did not raise my eyes, "Belle!" Then, after a little pause, "Dearest, won't you look at me?"

Compelled by that voice, I raised my eyes to his face, and seeing in them what I had no words to express, he put his arms about me again in a quick possessive gesture, drew me closer and closer until I could scarcely breathe, held me so for a long moment, and then bending me back in the circle of his arms, looked deep into my eyes, and then kissed me.

"You're mine, mine," he whispered over and over. "Tell me you love me, Belle."

Tell him I loved him! How *could* I find words—bald, inadequate words—for the music, the glory, the spring, the rapture that was almost pain, that was in my heart!

But if my clumsy speech failed, I know my look, my whole being, my yielding to his caresses, made plain my love.

"We will be so happy, dearest! I have loved you from that first morning you stepped into my room with your sweet dignity and timid loveliness—and to think that I have waited almost six months without telling you! But I have been afraid—as afraid to frighten you as I might some rare, wild, yet gentle bird that must be tamed by love. You are so different from any woman I have known——"

"And there must have been so many," I whispered.

He looked at me sharply, but laughed gayly. "Ah, ha! Jealous! Dearest, never be jealous of the past or fearful of the future. Only live in and enjoy the present, and you will always be happy. And we are going to have such a wonderful present!"

"Ah, but I cannot, Craig. I am different; the past and the future are always part of my present. When we are married——"

I stopped suddenly. Not a muscle of his face had moved, yet there was something about his expression—something indefinable—that sent a chill to my heart.

"Dearest, come nearer." He drew me closer within the circle of his arms and, looking into my eyes, spoke seriously: "You know I love you. You believe that, don't you?"

I gazed back into the clear, penetrating blueness of his eyes, where humor usually glinted with the effect of sunshine on blue water, but which were softly brilliant now, and hesitated.

"You do not—you cannot—doubt my love!" he cried.

"No—no, Craig, I believe you love me, but—not as well as I do you."

"I love you with all my heart! I am not capable of a deeper love than I have for you, but—and I beg you, Belle, to try to understand me in this—I cannot ask you to be my wife." That coldness penetrating deeper into my heart! "I cannot ask any woman to be my wife. I must—and will—have at any cost my freedom. Marriage robs a man like me, a man of my temperament, of something that he needs in his work. And I have forsworn it. But I love you, Belle, more than I have ever loved any woman, and I want you."

His voice was deep with feeling, and it broke at the last sentence, but his words fell on my ears like hammer blows.

"Then our love must come to nothing," I said. And I rose abruptly, lest he see in my eyes the agony that was in my heart.

He tried to overwhelm me with his protestations of love, but—although I was a seething mass of emotion within—outwardly I was adamant.

We returned to the city almost in silence; he, wrapped in his mantle of impenetrable hauteur, I in one of pain.

And so we continued for some time. I would have liked to give up my position—for to be in his presence day after day, in the chilling atmosphere of his reserve, was pain that became almost torture—but I couldn't face the thought of a return to the horror of those past months of idleness; and more compelling yet, I could not bear not to see him.

So the days lengthened into weeks, and all the time I was surreptitiously looking for another position with a dread of finding it; and in that time we were more like employer and employee than we had ever been. When he dictated—he did not work as steadily as usual, seeming restless—his voice was crisp, and cold, and the flow of his words uninterrupted, unless his gaze happened to rest on me, when invariably he would rise and move about.

On a day in the sixth week after this happened, although I did not hear him approaching, I felt him standing behind me as I bent over my notebook, waiting for him to continue; and as always in his near presence I began to tremble, in spite of my utmost effort to keep calm. I felt him draw nearer, stand above me. I tried to move, but could not. And suddenly his arms were about me, and he was kissing my hair.

I sat perfectly still for a long second; then I turned in his arms and gave myself to his kiss. All my scruples, all my fears, had surrendered to love.

I did not persuade myself that I was doing right; but I told myself that love for me meant sacrifice. In the long

nights of my fight against my love for Craig, I had tried to harden myself, knowing that surrender would be a fatal thing. And then the surrender became an accomplished fact. I loved Craig truly, really, deeply—as I love him yet—and my love for him was marred for me by only one fear, and for him, he claimed, by one determination on my part.

A determination from which nothing could move me—to take nothing from Craig except his love. I refused the splendid apartment he wanted to furnish for me; the car he wished to put at my convenience. I returned the beautiful clothes and gifts he would—did—buy me. I knew he was hurt, but my pride had its limit and it forbade him to misinterpret my love.

My fear was that Laura might come to know. Not that fear which I kept locked in a secret chamber of my heart so that I might ignore it, of losing Craig. So most unaccountably to myself I never said anything to Craig of Laura. She was so like a fragile, delicately beautiful flower, whose petals must not be touched or breathed upon by coarse air; she became a shrine at which my heart sought rest and healing. If only I could keep the knowledge from her of what I had done! I must keep it from her! It would break her heart.

Christmas came again, but I could not tear myself away from Craig—even if he would have heard of it—so I wrote Laura that I had to go to another city to do some special work for my employer. It hurt to have to lie to her; but I told myself I must get used to it. Besides, I had lied to her the previous Christmas, but for such a different reason.

Winter—such a gloriously happy winter for me—passed, faded, died in the tender embrace of spring, which blossomed into summer, and again I made excuses not to go back home, and Craig and I spent the summer together.

In the fall I brought to realization a plan I had long cherished of taking a small apartment for myself, paid for by myself in spite of Craig's protests, pleading, coldness and hauteur which lasted some days.

I had saved some of my salary and had received two checks for quite nice sums for two stories that I—I myself —had written and actually sold. It was Craig who helped me by his encouragement. I had told him of my unsuccessful effort the previous year; and when he had induced me to show him what I had written, he was so emphatic in his assurance that I had talent and ability to write that I rewrote one of the old stories and, following his advice, sold them both.

I don't think I have ever known greater joy than the notification of the acceptance of my story brought me. I had entered another world. Love had admitted me to one, and now something that had been within me all my life had emerged and opened the gate to another, a wider, richer, more wonderful world.

I found a very comfortable little apartment at a price I could afford, through Myra Langwell, a newspaper woman who dropped in to Craig's teas occasionally, and who seemed to have taken a fancy to me. She had an apartment in the same building.

It was not as modern as some of the later built apartments, but the rooms were a fair size and the living room boasted a real fireplace; and when I had finished furnishing it, which took some time, and a great deal of loving, joyous selection, I would not have changed it for anything a hundred times its value could have purchased.

In October, Craig, whose last two books had brought him considerable fame, commenced a series of lectures which he had been invited to give at some of the colleges; and during the following three months I saw very little of him, as he was out of town so much.

I finished up all his work, typed any stories he sent me, or brought home with him on his return to town; and in my spare time wrote at home myself.

On an afternoon late in December I sat at the desk in my cheerful living room, paper spread before me, my pen in hand, but unable to write. I watched the red and gold flames of the fire dancing sinuously to their own crackling music; their reflection on my few water colors and etchings, and in the glass of the bookcase. Through the chintz-hung window I watched a driving snowstorm mantle roofs, fire escapes, window sills, every crevice, with soft white. I felt remote, far away from the rushing noise of the streets, whose sound, deadened by the snow, came to me like the distant roar of a monstrous beast.

Yet, all the time I was listening for a footstep—for Craig. He had been out of town again for some days and I had not even heard from him and all afternoon the voice of that fear which I kept locked in a secret chamber of my heart had been whispering, then calling, things through the keyhole till my whole being echoed to its sneers and jeers.

Suddenly the handle of the door turned, then there was a tap at the panel and, my heart beating with joy, I sprang up and after a swift glance in the mirror, opened the door. It was Myra. She must have seen the disappointment in my face, for instead of entering without comment, as was her custom, she hesitated, giving me a searching look.

"Hello, am I intruding?"

I tried to hide my disappointment, and said cheerfully, "Of course not. Come in."

But I dreaded her presence that afternoon. Myra is about thirty, or a little over, and mannish, if you know what I mean. I like her. She is cynical and somewhat hard, but clever and frank and kind; but when she sets those bright eyes on you in a speculative look, you feel as if she is reading your innermost heart.

And when she had settled herself on my Chesterfield, her legs under her, and had lighted a cigarette, she proceeded to thus regard me. Finally she spoke:

"I suppose you are expecting Craig?"

"No." I hesitated. "Not exactly. I don't think he is back yet, unless he got home this afternoon."

She puffed in reflective silence a moment, then said abruptly: "He's in town all right. He phoned Wallace last night about his new serial."

"Lying to you! In town almost two days without seeing you—without even calling you!" shrieked that voice within me.

"Oh, of course I must have—" I started to say when the phone rang, and I flew to answer it. If only it were he! But it was only Mrs. Tufts, the janitress, to say a parcel had come for me when I was out.

I sat still at the phone a moment after hanging up the receiver, then got up and moved about, straightening an ornament on the mantlepiece, lifting a book from a chair; all the time feeling Myra's penetrating eyes on me, and wishing her away. Suddenly she said:

"My dear, tell me all about it."

I turned so that I faced her squarely. "About what?"

"About what is worrying you," she said, calmly.

I laughed carelessly, if rather mirthlessly. "Tell you what's worrying me? Well, first I'm stuck in my story—can't seem to get on at all. You know, Myra, writing is not as easy as it seems." If I could only distract her mind from the subject— "There was a time when I used to think it must be the most difficult thing to write a book. Then when I became Craig's secretary it seemed to me that it was one of the easiest. He does it so swiftly and seemingly easily, although I know he has his difficulties. But since I've been trying it myself, it seems more difficult than ever I used to think it."

"Oh, you don't need to tell me," she said carelessly, blowing smoke rings. "I haven't been on papers and magazines the last twelve years without knowing some of the difficulties. But the only thing is work! Work! Work! As long as the spark is there. And you have it, all right! That last story of yours showed that. But we were talking of what is worrying you. It's not your story."

I hesitated a moment, then decided to ask her help in something that had been troubling me.

"Well, not only," I answered her last statement. "You've heard me speak of my little sister, Laura." I had, in a moment of longing and loneliness, spoken of her to Myra, as we had become quite friendly. "You know she's at college in her last year. Well, she's coming here to-morrow to spend the Christmas holidays with me."

"Whew!" Myra whistled. Then, after a pause, "I suppose she knows nothing of you and Craig?"

"She's as far from knowing anything of Craig and me as a star is from its reflection in a puddle. And oh, Myra," I went over to the Chesterfield and sat down near her, "you must help me to keep her from finding out! She would be shamed, hurt to the heart—for she is that kind, Myra—by me, whom she thinks the most wonderful sister in the world. But her love for me is nothing to mine for her." Myra gave me a speculative, half-ironic glance. "You doubt that?" I cried. "I tell you, Myra, I love her better than anyone in the world. Yes, more even than Craig, for I have taken care of her since Mother died, when she was almost a baby, and she seems more like my child than my sister. You will help me, Myra?"

She reached out her hand and covered mine. "Of course. Don't worry, she shan't know. But how have you managed all the other holidays? It's two years now, isn't it?"

I told her how she had spent all her holidays back home, and of the excuses I had made.

"But this time, Myra," I finished, "I simply could not refuse her, especially as I thought Craig might be away then. And she is wild with joy at the thought of coming. I had a letter from her yesterday, and it was bubbling over with happiness. She says she has something wonderful to tell me, too. I wonder if the child could possibly be—in love!"

Myra flung herself about restlessly. "Poor child!" she cried. Then with a note of bitterness intermingled with pain: "What fools we are at that age! What happy fools! Panting on the threshold of a world that we think is created only for our dreams to come true in." She was silent a moment, then said abruptly, "Whatever brought you to the city, Belle?"

I told her of my coming, of my first work, of my long struggle; and she listened in a silence that held when I had finished. Then with a long sigh she said:

"So you became Craig's secretary!" Then after another pause, "Have you never thought that it might have been better, Belle, to go back, as you say you might? Forgive me if I am too frank. You know my failing."

There was something behind her attitude to-day. "Just what do you mean by that?" I asked quietly.

She raised herself, and clasping her arms and her knees, faced me. "Why, my dear, this sort of thing never lasts, you know. He is neglecting you now, and you know it. He——"

"He's not! He's not!" I cried passionately. "It is only that he is so busy—so much in demand. You know that!"

"Yes, I know that," she said coolly. "But I also happen to know that he is in town often, when you think him away. That he is not here nearly as often as he used to be. That—well, knowing Craig as I do—and that is as well as you do, perhaps, my dear—I think you had better face the truth."

As she spoke, a sickness seemed to spread from my heart all through me, so that I felt physically weak and nauseated; and I was trembling. But I spoke quietly, though haltingly, the words coming with difficulty from a tight throat:

"You think he doesn't care—for—me—any more? Or do you mean—that there is—someone else?"

She opened her arms in a wide gesture. "I mean nothing definite, only I think he is trying to break away." She went on consideringly, "I don't say he is not so fond of you still. It may be he has seen someone. Craig, my dear, is a garnerer of impressions and emotions, a prospector of the heart—mining for something more precious than gold; and in the quest he carelessly lets drain away the stream of love he lifts from each fresh heart. It may be his streak of genius—a sort of food genius demands. The food of genius!" She laughed bitterly. "You may even be somewhat alike——"

I sprang to my feet and cried: "No, no, Myra! You know that is not true! No, no, I love him! I love him! Do you think it was easy for me to do what I have done, brought up strictly, narrowly, as I was? Do you think I did not struggle against my love? And when it conquered me, do you dare to say it was anything but real love?"

I sank down and hid my face in my trembling arms, on the back of the chair; but in a moment I lifted my head again, and spoke tremblingly from the panic in my heart, "Myra, I could not live without him. You don't mean what you have been saying. You are only talking, as usual, Myra. I tell you I could not live without him!"

She said calmly, "You could. The only things one cannot really do without are the essentials—food, heat, all those things. Love is a luxury—an expensive one!—and one gets used to doing without it." Her voice changed, became gentler, almost humble, as she went on: "But forgive me,

dear. Forgive me if I doubted you for a moment. It is my wretched jealousy. Even you——"

I was turning to stare at her, bewildered, when suddenly there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs and landing —light steps, and heavy ones; the sound of something heavy being set down; and the murmur of voices. Then the bell rang. Puzzled, I went to open the door, and as I did so gave a cry of surprise.

My own darling, my pet, my Laura ran to me and took me into her arms. We were both greatly affected. It was so long since we had seen each other. But she had changed very little. Holding her back in the circle of my arms I saw that; the same delicate beauty, the same gentle, loving timidity. College had not robbed her of that unconscious appeal she made to the heart for care and protection; only given her more poise, a certain sweet dignity.

When we could speak coherently, I said, "But, darling, you said *to-morrow!*"

"Oh, I know, but I had everything packed and ready this morning and I thought, why waste a whole day? So I made up my mind quickly, and just thought I'd surprise you. You don't mind, Bonnie, darling?"

"Mind having you a whole extra day!" I exclaimed reproachfully, then drew her forward and introduced her to Myra, who was unusually gracious and kind.

"But, Laura," I said, "how did you manage all alone—at the station, and everything?"

She opened her eyes wide. "Oh, it was quite easy. Everyone was so kind and helpful. A porter called a taxi for me, and helped the chauffeur with my trunk; and when we arrived, the chauffeur insisted upon carrying it and my bag right up both flights, without any help."

Myra cast up her eyes mournfully. "Oh, Youth! And Gentle Timidity! How potent are thy appeals to the masculine heart! Had that been my luggage——"

Laura and I laughed at her. Then Laura fell into ecstasties over the apartment; and flew about from object to object, from room to room, like a happy, bright little bird, let loose in a new cage, admiring, exclaiming, enjoying. While she was in the bedroom, Myra said:

"What a sweet child! Why does she call you 'Bonnie,' Belle?"

I explained, "I was always called Bonnie at home. My name's Isabelle, you know. It was Craig who called me Belle." Then I spoke lower, very worried, "What if he should come in, Myra?"

"Don't worry," she whispered. "We'll manage to make him understand."

Laura came back without her hat and coat, her face alight. "I am going to be so happy here, Bonnie," she said, coming to me. "Let me look at you, darling. You're thin. You've been working too hard, what with your secretarial duties and your writing. Dear, I was so proud when I read your story. Wasn't it just splendid, Miss Langwell? I showed it to all the girls. But you mustn't overdo it."

"Nonsense, Laura!" I said chidingly, loving her praise and concern. "And because I've had one or two stories accepted you mustn't think I am an authoress, you know. I'll put the kettle on, and we'll have a cup of tea, eh?"

Myra jumped up. "Let me, Belle. You two stay here." And she went into the kitchen.

Laura and I sat down together on the Chesterfield, our arms about each other.

"It's so good to be with you again, Bonnie dear," she said lovingly. "I could scarcely wait the last few days."

"It's so good to have you," I answered, holding her tighter. Then after a little pause, "How did the exams go?"

"Oh, I think I have come out all right," she said so carelessly, that I looked at her in surprise, "but I'm not worrying—" She flushed and was confused under my gaze.

"Not worrying! You not worrying!" I repeated. "Well, that's the most surprising thing I have heard for a long time."

She snuggled a little close, and said shyly, "And yet—there's something else, dear, that will surprise you more."

"Your great secret!" I cried. "My darling, what is it?"

She clung to me, her face against me so that I had to bend over to hear the broken, stumbling phrases in which she tried to express what was in her heart. "I'm so happy, Bonnie, so terribly happy. . . . I love him so. I'm all the time afraid it can't be true, or that something will happen to make it not come true. He loves me, he says, more than he has ever loved anyone. And he is so famous! I love him. He wants me to marry him so soon."

I saw the handle of the door turn, but before I could move there came a sharp, impatient rap. I sprang up, but Myra, who had just entered, gave me a significant look, and went to the door and opened it.

Craig, his cane over his arm, his hat and gloves in his hand, his face wearing a displeased expression at the sight of Myra, stepped in. And then he stood stock still as Laura sprang up from the sofa and flew into his arms.

In the sudden, startled, shocked, electrical silence that followed, I saw him through a blind haze, holding her to him, kiss her in a dazed, dumfounded way. He looked at me over her head. I sat as if turned to stone. I saw it all as in some horrible nightmare in which I was unable to speak, or move, from which I was only awakened when Laura, perhaps conscious of something sinister in the silence, freed herself from Craig's nerveless clasp, turned, and looking from one to the other of us, cried out in a frightened voice—the old frightened cry of her childhood when I had soothed her in some terror— "What is it, Bonnie? What's the matter?"

My limbs felt actually heavy when I moved, but I man-

I sat as if turned to stone. I was unable to speak or move. In the sudden silence that followed, I saw him through a blind haze, holding her to him in a dazed, dumbfounded way, as he looked at me over her head

aged—though God alone knows how!—a smile; and after a moment or two, to steady my shaking voice well enough to speak.

"My dear! Such a surprise! That you should know Cr—Mr. Farrell—I am his—secretary. That you should know him!" I sank down on a chair, being really afraid that I would fall.

Laura came over and stood near me, a look of trouble still in her eyes.

"He has been giving us lectures, and—we—Craig loves me, Bonnie. I was just telling you when he came." Her voice became pleading. "Aren't you pleased, dear?"

Craig came forward then and took Laura's hand, attempted to speak, cleared a suddenly husky throat. "Miss Douglass—Belle, I met your sister at college, as she says, but I had not the slightest idea she was *your* sister. The name being the same never struck me, unlikely as that might seem to you. Besides, when she spoke of a sister once or twice that I remember, she called her by an unfamiliar name."

He paused a moment, then went on in a deeper, less halting voice: "I—I love her very dearly. It is a love that came so swiftly as to overwhelm me, and yet has made life and its true meaning very clear to me. I want her to marry me—very soon."

Like a creature being tortured, I rose a little wildly, seeking some egress; but he stood before me with Laura clinging to his arm. It was the puzzled pain, the childlike look of receiving disapproval where she had expected praise, in her face, that stilled the panic within me. I stood silent and gazed steadily into his face for a long moment, almost as a stranger might have done, trying to read what I had never seen there before.

He said very low, almost pleadingly: "I love her. I want her for my wife."

His voice had that tone that could always set my heart quivering, and I turned aside slightly, as I said with lips that trembled, though I held my voice steady by a supreme effort, "If Laura loves you . . . her happiness is all that counts."

Laura said in a bewildered, disappointed, rather piteous voice: "Bonnie, don't you like Craig?"

I rallied all my forces and turned to her tenderly; spoke scoldingly: "Silly child, of course I do, but isn't he stealing you from me?"

She said swiftly, earnestly: "He can never, never do that. He will soon love you as I do, and we will all three be so happy together."

I turned appealingly to Myra. "Myra, dear, weren't we to have some tea? I would like a cup after all this excitement."

"Heavens!" she cried. "I came in to ask you where you keep your sugar. It's Craig's fault if the tea has turned to gall." She flashed him an intangible smile and went out, returning immediately with the tray, which she placed near me, purposely, I think, so that I should have something to do.

Craig rose carelessly to hand it, but I, who knew him so well, saw that he was very nervous.

Laura said suddenly, "I am still so puzzled, Craig. How did you know I was here?"

He answered teasingly, a quizzical note in his voice: "Listen to the naughty conceit of her! If I am not the *raison d'être* there can be no reason. I did not know, my dear." I saw him glance at me covertly, felt his eyes on me, almost continually thereafter. "I came up to see your sister about a new story I am thinking of commencing next week. You see, she didn't know I was in town and didn't come down to-day. She has been kind enough to allow me to come occasionally before, to discuss a new story. I have the highest opinion of her judgment—and good sense—

and feeling." He finished with a slight emphasis that I understood, and I smiled coldly.

"It seems wonderful to me that you two should know each other—have known each other so long," Laura said happily. Then she turned and looked at me with the trouble still in the depths of her eyes. "But surely it's strange that you never mentioned Craig in you letters, Bonnie?"

I said so flippantly that Craig gave me a sharp look, "My dear, do you think all the world is in love with your Craig?" Then more quietly, "Besides, I mentioned him to you when I first became his secretary—I must have—and you forgot all about it, not knowing him then."

"Perhaps," she said doubtfully, still watching me, "but I don't remember."

I smiled reassuringly at her. "It really makes no difference now, does it, dear? But surely Craig knew you were coming for the holidays?"

Craig spoke sharply. "No, Laura, why did you not tell me you were coming?"

Laura laughed happily, mischievously, her face falling into the dainty curves of merry youth, her white teeth gleaming, her dark blue eyes narrowed between their long, curved lashes, her honey-colored head a little back, so that the graceful curve of her throat gleamed swan-white; and, as he watched her, I saw a purer flame leap in Craig's blue eyes than any I had ever seen there before.

"That was my surprise for you. Don't you remember when you were at the college last Wednesday?"—last Wednesday, when I had so eagerly awaited his return!—"that I told you I was preparing the most wonderful surprise for you? And don't flatter yourself, sir, that you were the only one who got a surprise, for my dear Bonnie didn't expect me until to-morrow."

Myra spoke quietly. "Well, my dear, 'people who surprise are not always wise,' for Belle was telling me just

before you came that she had left all her shopping till to-morrow, and that she hadn't a thing in the house."

I seized Myra's cue eagerly, out of a sort of dark haze that had settled over me. "It is quite true, dear," I said. "Craig must take you out to dinner to-night. I expected to prepare such a splendid dinner for you to-morrow—and we will have it, too—a regular celebration of your engagement. But to-night——"

She interrupted me, "Oh, no, Bonnie! Not my first night at home, and with so much to tell you! It doesn't matter what we eat. Craig can stay, too, can't he? We will fix up something. I will—I am good at cooking."

I looked at her apologetically. "Darling, I hate to send you away your first night, but I must. Craig," I gave him an urgent look, "insist on her going. I know she's eaten nothing to-day, with all the excitement she's had."

"Why, of course, dearest, you'll come." At the sound of that endearment, and the tone of his voice—that something of command, masculine surety, even loving peremptoriness, that few women could resist in him, and I, never—I turned away. "You've two weeks to be with your sister. But hurry, like a dear. It's late, and I've promised to see a man a moment or two, before six."

Laura said in a hurt way, "All right—if Bonnie doesn't want me——"

I turned swiftly then, and held out my arms; and whatever she found in my "Darling! Darling!" made her quickly repentant, so that she ran to me, and kissed me, saying, "Oh, forgive me, Bonnie dear." Then she freed herself. "I'll hurry. I'll just change my dress. But don't get impatient, Craig, will you?"—looking at him half-timidly, lovingly, a look answered by that flame of love I had seen in his eyes before—"because I have to unpack it."

"Let me help you," Myra said, and rising, put her arm through Laura's and went out, closing the door softly.

I stood silent near the hearth, gazing at the flaming logs, and felt him come close behind me.

"Belle!" he said pleadingly. And again, "Belle—" but I did not answer nor move until I felt his touch on my arm; then I swung around to face him, a fury of anger and pain within me.

"Don't you dare touch me! Don't touch me!" I panted.

We confronted one another, eye to eye, for a long moment, then he looked away.

"My God, what a mess! Why didn't you ever tell me that you had a sister up at that college?" he said a little hoarsely.

"Perhaps because some instinct warned me to keep her from your knowledge, who had brought shame to me. You never loved me!" I answered bitterly.

He turned. "Belle, I loved you—more than anyone I had ever cared for before. But—" he drew a long breath— "I love Laura more. I can't help it. She is the first woman I have ever wanted to make my wife—the first woman I would fight to make my wife. Belle, you can be revenged on me, but you will destroy her happiness at the same time."

"And after these two years that is all you know of me!" I said with pain. "Real love never seeks revenge—but you never knew real love! You never loved me. Destroy her happiness! She is dearer to me than life"—my voice broke —"or happiness. But, oh!"—I turned to him wildly—"if you ever fail her—if you ever make *her* unhappy, I think I will kill you with my own hands. I——"

He silenced me with an imperative gesture, and said with his old pride! "You need have no fear. Her happiness is as dear to me as it is to you." There was a little silence, then he spoke impulsively: "Belle, let us be friends in this new life. Let me help you—try and forgive me—for her sake, Belle."

I said with bent head, in a low voice: "For her sake—

I—must not. I must go away. Perhaps I shall go back home—our old home—" It came suddenly to my mind as a haven for the wreck of my life.

"Back to the lawyer chap!" he said with a half sneer, in a voice that in the days that were past I would have sworn held jealousy. And dead hope for a moment leaped in my heart. There was just a chance that I might win him back. If it had been anybody but Laura I would have fought for him with every art and artifice known to woman. If it had been anybody but Laura. Then he spoke swiftly, with his old loving gentleness: "Belle, forgive me, dearest. Won't you, Belle?"

I cried out with the unbearable pain his sudden tenderness awakened: "Don't! Oh, don't speak to me like that! Be cold, indifferent, angry—anything but loving. Oh, Craig, Craig, how could you? How could you take my love—me —all my hopes, and dreams, not loving me?"

"But I did——"

"Never! Never!" I cried. "And now Laura! Am I doing right? Am I——"

I stopped and turned hastily away, fighting for composure as Myra and Laura, dressed to go out, entered. Craig put on his coat, and picked up his hat and stick. Laura kissed Myra and me, and Craig gave Myra his hand, and then held it out to me. When I put mine in it, he said in a very low voice: "Try not to think too hard of me. I am always your friend." Then he turned to Laura, with, "Come, dear," and to us again with a last bow. He was gone—gone from my life forever.

But in a moment Laura was back, her arms around me, speaking breathlessly: "Oh, darling, I had to come back a moment—to make sure you are glad. You have not told me so. And I can't go away and be happy, if you are not."

I kissed her tenderly, and spoke seriously: "Of course I am glad, dear. How could I be anything else if you are

happy? If you are sure, Laura?" I gazed closely into her eyes. "If you are only sure?"

"So sure, old darling!" She answered rapturously. "So very, very sure! Isn't he wonderful, Bonnie! How could you have been with him and not loved him yourself?" My eyes dropped before her bright gaze, but I raised them swiftly at the little sob in her voice as she kissed me. "My dearest dear, who has given up everything all her life, for my happiness. Oh, I must fly. Coming, Craig!"—as he tapped on the door— "Coming!" And the door closed behind her.

Closed behind her, shutting in with me black despair and terror, dread and loneliness, all the grinding devils that gibe at spurned love. I stood still where Laura had left me, staring unseeingly at the dying fire. I heard Myra gather up the cups and go into the kitchen; and the rigor that had seemed to hold my limbs in its grip loosened its hold, so that I sank down on the floor, buried my head in my outflung arms, above my clasped, writhing hands.

Presently I became aware that Myra was sitting on the Chesterfield, her hand on my head. Heard her voice:

"Belle, don't! Don't take it so hard. In your heart you must have known it was coming. Be thankful it came so sharply and swiftly. That you are spared the days and nights of doubt, and dread, and fear. Of hope and despair."

I raised my strained, despairing face. "How am I going to put in these two weeks? I can never keep her from suspecting—from being made unhappy. You can see she feels something is wrong already. Myra, for God's sake, what am I to do?"

"Be brave, my dear," she said firmly. "I will help you. I am just thinking. . . . Perhaps I can get you something to do for my paper . . . get you called away, and I will take care of her. Don't get in a panic. We will do something—and think of what you are doing! Greater love hath

no woman, my dear, than she who gives up her love for her friend."

I laughed bitterly, harshly, "Gives up! After I am given up!"

"But you could have had your revenge," she said quietly.

"And broken her heart!" I cried. "Make her suffer what I am suffering. No!" I broke off passionately. "She could *never* suffer that, for he loves her. That's the bitter part, Myra. He never loved me!"

Myra spoke slowly. "I know. Nor me."

I raised my head in sharp surprise, and stared at her in astonishment.

She nodded her head, said bitterly: "Oh, my heart hangs on his belt, too. Battered and dried, and forgotten now; but fresh enough, and full enough of hopes and dreams, a matter of ten years ago. He was quite young then—and so wonderful! But he got over it quickly—much faster than I." She gave a long sigh. "But time works wonders, Belle, and work. Especially work. You will even find that you will be better equipped for your work—mind broadened, sympathies deepened, better understanding. I don't know if it's all worth the price—bitter price."

I knelt and opened up my arms, and we clasped each other in silence.

That evening at about eleven o'clock as Myra and I sat, planning a way for me to leave the city, there came the sound of footsteps on the staircase and landing, again—heavy footsteps, before whose entrance I fell back as from Death itself.

Many men were there, Craig among them—a half-crazed Craig, who carried a limp, girlish form in his arms—my darling—dead.

It seemed that when she left the theater with Craig, and while they waited for his car, she stepped off the curb—whether she did so unseeingly, or whether she was pushed,

they never knew—into the direct path of a backing car. And when they raised her, she was dead.

I have very little more to tell. Words are poor, pitiful things in which to try to describe great joy, or great grief —all real emotions of the heart, in any case.

I have become successful, even won some fame, in the world of literature, but though I have achieved so much, it was not until recently that I know at what a cost.

I was turning out an old trunk in which I had placed Laura's clothes after her death, when from the pocket of the coat she had worn that fatal night I saw protruding a theater program. I drew it out and idly turned the pages, when my eye caught some writing in pencil, in the corner of one of them: "It was not until to-day that I learned how noble love can be. I know you love him, too. What love has done, love can do. Good-by, my darling."

I sat very still for a long time. Words that Myra had spoken long ago etched themselves into my consciousness: "Greater love hath no woman, than she who gives up her love for her friend." I caught my breath in a great sob: she had given more than love.

III

Can Love Cost Too Much?

IT WAS early October in New York. Although long past her closing hour, Roberta had sat in the plain little office of her stenographers' employment agency, patiently waiting for me. In her observant middle-aged eyes I thought I detected both tolerance and amusement as I scurried toward her.

"When you telephoned me yesterday," she began, without preliminaries, "and excitedly begged me for substitute work immediately, I wondered what was wrong, Jean."

I ran to her and threw my arms around her.

"You're a darling," I burst out, pressing the mole on the back of her neck, a teasing gesture that I had employed since kindergarten days. "I do need substitute work. Oh, how I need a change!"

Roberta had known me since childhood. She was Mother's best friend. She had found me my stenographic job with Halligan after Mother died. A year earlier I had had a chance to get into the Follies. I was wildly eager to go on the stage, and the ballet instructor in the apartment next to ours had encouraged me.

"You dance like Pavlowa, Jean," he said. "With your brown eyes, and your perfect little body, you'll create a sensation. Your saucy mannerisms and that little 'I'll-do-as-I-please-in-spite-of-the-devil' air you have, all give you a distinct personality. You're an appealing child, a grown woman, and an imp of mischief all in one. You'll make a hit!"

But poor, sick Mother had carried on so at the mere sug-

gestion of my going on the stage, that in kindness to her, I had to quit thinking about it. Roberta had generously taken her own money and sent me to a business college, thus settling my career. Since then Roberta had never failed to listen understandingly whenever I stormed about my humdrum existence. I always felt relieved after telling my troubles to her.

I walked over toward the window, stretching my five feet two inches as high as I could.

"I'm all nerves, Roberta, jerky. Give me any kind of job where the words *hardware, plastering,* or *lumber* won't be used. Let me work for a lawyer, an architect, a doctor—anybody who's different!"

"Yes, I've heard you rave about monotony before——"

"Well, look at me—I'm twenty years old, and nothing ever happens to me except humdrum things. I feel like throwing bombs into Hades itself to open the gates of my desire. Mother was too strict with me, Roberta; she was always afraid that I expected too much from life. She never got anything exciting out of life herself. She was too resigned. I was made for love! Watch me force my happiness."

"What's the new job got to do with these things?" Roberta asked.

"Just this much," I tried to explain, perching on the arm of her chair and fingering her long string of amber beads. "Halligan's proposed to me, and it's time for me to start something."

"I'm not surprised, Jean," Roberta said. "You've inherited your father's temperament, Jean. The eternal love flame is everlastingly smoldering or burning in you. It's this warming quality that draws men to you. You're like a fire in a cheerless wilderness. I'm telling you this, because the time has come for you to understand yourself. This quality in your father made your mother's life a trag-

edy, and was the cause of his death. A jealous woman shot him, Jean. I don't suppose your mother ever told you?"

I stared at her in amazement.

"No," I managed to gasp, but she went on explaining.

"Women flocked around your father, sensing in him the eternal lover. While your nature will enable you to draw your mate to you, this quality can easily develop into a curse."

"Oh, Roberta!" I broke out, saucer-eyed.

"It's not only that," Roberta continued. "Homely women in history, who possessed this quality, still managed to have big men at their feet. But in addition, you inherit the provocative eyes and sensuous body all the women of your father's family had. You're twenty this month. Now do you understand why your poor mother walled you in so frantically? She trembled for you, child. If you'll understand yourself, Jean, you'll be able to avoid the pitfalls that surely are lying in wait for you."

"My dear!" I exclaimed, excitedly walking up and down the room. "Don't stop. Tell me more!" I was listening, spellbound. I was not merely interested but thrilled.

Roberta got terribly solemn.

"I can tell you one thing. Your adorable little body is going to drive more than one man mad unless you learn to erect a barrier of reserve around yourself. Just your eyes alone, without your realizing it, would set virile men on fire. They are brimming over with passion and audacious coquetry. You have what the French call temperament. Remember it, Jean, and be careful. No, I'm not at all surprised that Halligan proposed."

I was terribly impressed, but I tried not to show it.

"Halligan caught me in one of my rebellious moods, I guess," I said to Roberta. "He proposed by saying, 'I've been building houses long enough to have a pretty fair income. You're not getting any kick out of life. I can do

a lot for you, and I will be good to you. Why don't you marry me, and we'll both be able to collect quite considerable back pay for what we've missed!' He's got the smallest blue eyes, Roberta, and when he asked me to marry him, they looked so twinkly——"

I paused. Halligan, of course, was old enough to be my father. Even if he had a red nose and a pudgy little figure, he was very rich, and plenty of woman would have been pleased to get him. And he had proposed to me after I had worked for him only two months!

Roberta smiled and asked, "What did you say to Mr. Halligan?"

"I begged him to let me get away for a month, so I would have time to think it over and make a wise decision."

"So that's why you acted as though you were being pursued by a fire company, when you came dashing in my office," Roberta exclaimed.

I hugged her again.

"Yes. What kind of a job have you got for me?"

She reached into her desk drawer and handed me a card. I read aloud:

VERNON BOND. Attorney. Exchange Building.
Substitute stenographer. Secretary's gone to Arizona.
Good opening. May be permanent.

Roberta laughed.

"Here's one man who won't propose to you, Jean, because he's already married. I lived next door to the Bonds for years. They have a charming place on the outskirts of Suburbia which Mrs. Bond inherited from a spinster aunt. If there's anything important going on at school or church, Mrs. Bond is invariably in the lead. She's an influence in her community."

She thoughtfully fingered her amber beads.

"I felt sorry for the poor thing in her early marriage. Her man-hating spinster aunt in rearing her had implanted some queer notions into her mind. But the girl developed into a super-teacher. She knew English from a to z. But she should have avoided marriage. Bond was a young lawyer, and her bright mind attracted him. She set him straight on more than one problem in his early career."

I was hunched up on my chair again, head in hands, listening to every word. Roberta went on.

"The physical side of marriage was utterly distasteful to Mrs. Bond. Still, when she knew motherhood was approaching, she went into it as thoroughly as she had her school work. Her two children don't get a great deal of affection, because their mother is cold. But she's training them well notwithstanding, and they have superbly healthy bodies. Mr. Bond can well be proud of his home and family. With the one exception of her being cold-natured, she's a good deal of a woman."

Roberta's informative conversation had opened up new worlds for me, but I listened as though unimpressed. I looked at the card again.

"Job might as well be permanent, if I don't marry Halligan," I rebelled. "Twenty years from now, I'll still be pounding a typewriter for a mere pittance. What's gone wrong with the stars, Roberta, that I must exist in that hole, up five flights, cook rump steak and potatoes to keep going, mend and press—and with my looks and temperament? If only Mother had let me join the Follies, think of all the excitement I'd have! She was always scaring me, trying to keep me resigned. But I'm going to change my life now, someway. If I have to throw bombs into Hades itself, I'll find an opening for love and happiness."

"Jean, don't you know yet that love and happiness lie on the knees of the gods? You can't coerce fate, dear."

"Oh, rot, Roberta, can't I! I was made for love, not

this kind of grind. If my happiness lies on the knees of the gods, I'll see to it that they don't stand up. You watch me."

I felt very sure of myself.

"You've been a handful since your mother died, Jean," Roberta declared as she pulled down the top of her roller desk. She wriggled into her wraps, and stooped down to kiss me.

"Call me up again soon, dear," she reminded me as we both hurried out of the now empty building.

I had a good notion to take the dollar left in my purse from last week's groceries, and have the fortune teller in the next block read my palm. Still, I'd have to press my dress to wear in the morning. I stamped up the five flights, and nibbled distastefully at a left-over veal chop and some lettuce. I wasn't hungry. My radiator was stone cold. The stopped-up sink I had reported to the janitor that morning hadn't been repaired.

I protested to the empty room. "Oh, I want a canopied bed to curl up in, shaded lights, and a satin eiderdown to keep me warm while I eat squab from a tray with a pink rosebud on it!"

To-night my squalid room filled me with intolerable rebellion. The faded walls, the windows overlooking a village of sooty chimneys irritated me more than ever.

"Ugh!" I exclaimed aloud. "There's nothing in dreams or feelings! Why keep waiting, like an idiot, for the Big Man I have always belonged to in my dream?"

All my life I had shied away from temptation for him, made myself lovely as possible—for him! Each month I had felt sure he would come to life. Especially since Mother's death, I had assured myself over and over that he and I were destined for an overwhelming passion. He would be powerful in every way. We'd recognize each other the moment we met. In the lonely hours in my room

I could sense him in the shadows, just out of reach.

"Still, he's there," I assured myself occasionally. "And when the time's ripe, he'll claim me."

This was the actual reason why I was holding off Halligan.

That night, talking to my reflected self in the mirror as I frequently did when I prepared for bed, I threatened rather wistfully.

"One more month, Big Man, and I'll be gone when you reach out for me. Romance is dead in this humdrum world! You'll have to journey through life without your real mate. I'll marry Halligan, live and die my life a clod. And you'll have to exist like a clod, too."

Then I began to cry as I cold creamed my face.

"What good is it going to do me that my skin is dazzlingly white?" I crept miserably under the lumpy, heavy cotton comfortable my landlady had allotted to me. The window was rattling dismally in the October wind.

"At least Halligan will give me a decent home," I reflected as my tears wet the pillow. "Big Man, good-by," I whispered softly, turning my face to the dry side, and drawing my feet up under my gown to avoid shivering with the cold.

A self-confident boy in Vernon Bond's office appraised my trim business costume next morning. He indicated a closet for my wraps.

"Boss'll be here in exactly five minutes," he volunteered as he grinned at the clock. "He's one prompt man."

From a window I looked down sixteen stories at a traffic jam. As my feet sank into the heavy carpet, and as I noticed how luxuriously the room was furnished, I felt grateful that Tessie, the beauty parlor operator across the hall, had taken me in hand. When I had announced, "Tessie, I'm looking for a new job in the morning," she had responded enthusiastically, "You'll look wonderful with

your curly hair and brown eyes. Wear your tailored brown dress with the satin collar that matches your hair. It's nifty and businesslike, too."

She stood off and appraised me.

"Child, you've got million dollar legs, all right, and those brown pumps fit your feet exactly. Wish I were little and slim like you," she sighed. "I just can't reduce, even if I do diet."

I felt perfectly at ease, because I knew I was well groomed. An ambulance was rushing down the street. It came to a stop. "Somebody had been run over," I concluded, when suddenly I felt eyes focused upon me.

I looked up into the face of a giant of a man. His cheeks were ruddy with October wind, his clothes just right in every way. But his brown eyes! The moment I looked into them I was seized with the uncanny certainty that he belonged to me, and unconsciously I started toward him. I wanted without delay to feel those arms now hanging passively at his side crushing me possessively to him. I was inwardly trembling as I jerked myself into reality.

I was here, a stenographer, to take his dictation. In a courteous enough voice I explained: "I'm Miss Jean Bowers. The Commonwealth Agency sent me to Mr. Bond to act as a substitute stenographer."

"I am Mr. Bond," he replied in a matter-of-fact way. But his eyes were not matter-of-fact. They regarded me with thoughtful tenderness.

After a brief interview I was given the position. "Will you open my letters, while I step across the hall a minute?" he said, starting for the door.

I walked to his desk and sank into his chair. Of course, he would be in the corridor by this time, but to make sure I looked back. He was lingering in the doorway, watching me.

I flushed with confusion. The door closed. What made

me feel so queer and tremulous? Why had he paused to look back at me? No man ever before had affected me like this, not even the two who asked me to marry them. Vernon Bond's mere presence filled me with an almost irresistible desire to caress him. I was frightened at the impulses he aroused.

I began wondering about his wife. My pulse throbbed with feverish excitement as I pictured their honeymoon. Where did they go, I wondered. How could it be possible that a superb giant like Vernon could fail to get response from any woman, English teacher or what not? How could she be cold to him? That couldn't be marriage, I decided.

"I'd better be careful," I upbraided myself, recalling Roberta's warning. And then I thrilled as I looked at myself in the mirror.

Oh, was I made to drive men mad? Could I draw my mate to me, if I tried? I studied my eyes critically, and as I stared, a new exultant light began dancing in them.

"I want to be the flame that will warm him forever," I declared under my breath. "If it's really true that I have this power of attraction, I'm going to use it with all my might, if Hades itself explodes and burns us all up."

Then I recalled how Roberta was worrying about me, and I sobered down.

When Mr. Bond returned, I was seated, notebook ready, in the stenographer's chair. I grew serenely content as he dictated. When finally he stopped and I glanced up from my notes to make sure he had finished, our eyes met again. The strongest presentiment that we would be lovers bore down upon me. Not a personal word had been spoken; yet unmistakably our eyes were telegraphing back and forth. "You're mine—mine!"

My hands were shaking as I picked up my notes. He reached for a brief with feigned preoccupation. The air was surcharged with a new force, electrical, compelling,

vital. I could sense the magnetism of his presence as plainly as though a storm was approaching.

Vernon Bond's face in repose was almost grave, but his eyes were stirringly tender. His whole nature seemed somnolent, like winter waiting for the spring thaw. Whenever I caught him watching me, I read a great hunger in his eyes.

His huge desk held no photographs. Only bronze articles of utility rested there, except one single ornament. It was a statuette of exquisite marble, the nude figure of a girl poised for flight. She rested lightly on the toes of her right foot as she held out seductive arms.

"Looks as though she's just heard her lover's latchkey, and was dancing impulsively down the stairs to fly into his arms on the first landing," I thought. As I stood there admiring it, I could just feel myself dancing that same way. A provocative light gleamed in the eyes of that marble girl, and her little nose had ever so slight a tilt to it, just like mine.

I noticed Mr. Bond's fingers frequently caressing the figure, inch by inch. "Why, I do believe he actually talks to it!" I concluded in amazement.

At my earliest opportunity I studied it closer. "I might have been the model for it," I exulted. "Oh, I'm so glad I'm little and slim, if he admires that type." My heart, like an imprisoned bird at mating time, began singing.

For ten days our repressed office routine continued. Yet I felt strangely stimulated. I was turning out perfect copy faster than usual. My business conversation with Vernon Bond was scrupulously impersonal, yet every night since our first meeting, as I waited on the outskirts of slumber, his arms were enfolding me tenderly. I waited breathlessly for his kiss, and could feel his warm lips brushing mine. Then invariably I awakened at just this stage, sobbing tremulously and calling his name.

On the eleventh morning, Vernon's face was almost stern. He avoided my eyes. But his fingers lingered caressingly on the statuette, and he put away in a drawer the crêpe-de-chine handkerchief I had dropped during dictation. His face was tragically resolute as he said without looking up. "Please drop this letter in the mail-chute immediately.

But he kept fingering the statuette.

During my absence he had unwrapped a photograph in a dull gold frame. An intellectual woman of perhaps thirty-five, plump and matronly, gazed at me with impersonal eyes. A boy of ten and a five-year-old girl completed the group.

The dominant quality in all three faces was independence and self-possession. I began to understand why Vernon's fingers so often caressed the lovely marble on his desk. There was nothing yielding about the woman in the picture. She stood confidently on her own two feet, terribly self-sufficient.

I marveled that motherhood had been a possibility to so cold-natured a woman. To me it seemed incredible that a glorious full-lipped creature like Vernon could ever have been attracted to her.

To myself I cried, "You're mine, darling, in spite of this mutual resistance. Some day this icicle woman will fade out of your life and you'll belong to me! I can't bear the frustrated dreams much longer!"

Then I seemed to hear Roberta's warning words echoing, "On the knees of the gods!"

"I will force my happiness," I declared that night, falling asleep as I dreamed of Vernon.

On the twelfth morning when I approached Vernon to place the typed letters on his desk, he hurriedly got out his knife and began sharpening a pencil. A wave of fear made me hurry away. I was afraid that in spite of my repression, my arms would steal around his neck.

It was Saturday and the office closed at one. I felt fagged with the effort of keeping a grip on myself. I wished I had more work to keep me busy. To subdue the overwhelming impulses that his mere presence was intensifying day after day, I copied words out of a dictionary during my short intervals of idleness.

Aback, abascus, Abaddon, abaft! Then unconsciously I typed, Vernon Bond, Jean Bowers, Vernon's loving brown eyes, mouth made for kisses, arms just the right size to enfold a beloved woman. Then guiltily I'd continue—abandon, abash, and on and on.

At last the morning was over. I hated to think of my room with its unrealized dreams. I preferred returning to the office, pretending work, while I copied words out of the dictionary. It would be wise to impress that family photograph indelibly on my mind. I would force myself to become indifferent.

Two hours later I reëntered the office. The building apparently was deserted. But instead of emptiness in my own work place, I discovered Vernon sitting with bowed head on his desk, clutching the statuette.

My heart skipped a beat.

"Are you ill, Mr. Bond?" I asked softly, struggling to keep out of my voice my great love for him.

He looked hungrily into my eyes. Instantly all my self-control was swept away. I forgot he was married. My arms were closing around his neck. He was straining me to him possessively. And the beloved lips that had eluded me in my dreams, now bore down upon mine in ecstasy.

The room was breathlessly quiet. How long our lips clung, I cannot say. Inner voices were singing jubilantly, "All my life I have waited for this," as Vernon's strong arms pressed me closer and closer.

"I love you, Jean, I love you," he whispered hoarsely, as he kissed me again and again.

The ringing telephone brought us back to earth. I was dizzy and weak. Shakily I sought my typewriter, but my fingers floundered on the keys. The world seemed rocking on its foundation, but nothing mattered.

"He loves me!" I whispered to myself, over and over. "I have forced my happiness to come to me."

Later I dropped into Roberta's office, where she sat alone, checking up.

"Glad to see you, Jean," she beamed. "You must have been terribly busy, neglecting me for twelve days running. How's the job?"

"Pretty fair," I answered indifferently, to throw her off the trail. I was trying to act casual, but inside me a thousand little birds seemed bursting their very throats for happiness.

Roberta looked at me searchingly. She had looked at me that same way, when during Mother's fatal illness she had promised to keep an eye on me.

"Jean, tell me what has happened," she probed kindly.

That irritated me.

"Do I look different than I did twelve days ago?" I retorted bravely enough, consulting my cheap little wrist watch.

"It's happened," she murmured cryptically to herself.

"For heavens' sake, Roberta," I demanded, "why so dramatic? What's happened?"

She opened her lips to speak, closed them again, looked out of the window. I got up to go.

"Jean, wait a minute," she remonstrated, placing a detaining hand on my shoulder. "Remember, I'm not trying to preach. I love you, child, but I'm wondering if you realize."

I stared at her. Was Roberta a mind reader? Her lips trembled ever so slightly, and she nervously fingered her amber beads as if they were a rosary.

"Jean, you've fallen in love," she declared softly. "Remember that Vernon Bond is a married man, that his wife is a thoroughly fine woman, even if her nature is cold. I'm familiar with conditions in the Bond home. I told you before that I was Mrs. Bond's neighbor."

Then she searched my face with earnestness.

"I'd be afraid of you, knowing your temperament, if I didn't understand Mr. Bond's character so well. He's not the type of man who would keep a mistress. If ever he fell in love, he'd divorce his wife and marry the girl. He's that kind of a man."

My heart was beating crazily. I clutched my hands as I listened breathlessly.

"You can't afford to become involved in an affair of that kind, Jean. Knowing the nature of his wife, I can easily understand the terrible attraction you have for him. But a divorce would ruin his future."

She paused, evidently expected me to say something, but I merely looked at some books on her desk. She continued explaining. "The Bonds are a promising family. Love is wonderful to be sure, but Jean, it's only one of the wonderful things. Duty, loyalty, they too, come in for their share of consideration."

I was making a discovery as I stared at her. Roberta was another one of the resigned kind, like Mother. She also believed in accepting the niggardly gifts which the gods doled out to her. Well, I wouldn't.

"I will force my happiness," I vowed under my breath, as Roberta's persuasive voice continued.

"Mr. Bond has two children. They need him. His wife is a capable woman. Her pride and self-sufficiency would make her pretend indifference, if her husband asked for his freedom. But she has been, and still is for that matter, a mental stimulant to her husband."

I said not a word.

"Jean, be careful, child," Roberta pleaded, clutching my hand in her earnestness. "Don't try to force happiness at so great a price. At your age you don't realize that you can't coerce fate."

"Oh, my goodness, Roberta," I interrupted impatiently. "What do you know of love? You haven't even been married! You can't understand why I'd rather die than go on craving love and being starved for it."

"Don't I?" she whispered, as though to herself. And then tears gathered in her middle-aged eyes. "Oh, my dear, my dear," was all she said as I kissed her penitently and almost ran out of her office.

I was ahead of time for work Monday morning. I was shocked when I noticed how worn Vernon looked. He seemed as if he had passed through a scorching emotional crisis. He went directly to his desk.

"I'm swamped with important work," he began in a strained voice, gently pushing the statuette out of sight. He picked up a letter and began dictating.

Suddenly his face paled. He half closed his eyes, and reaching blindly for my hand, whispered, "Jean, my little Jean, come to me." He pulled me over to his chair.

I was in his arms again, all my longing expressing itself in my clinging lips. "You're mine!" I whispered fiercely. "Nothing shall come between us."

I kissed him again and again.

"Yes, I'm yours," he answered, "body and soul. Jean, do you realize what has happened? You have no stability. You're just an impulsive, moody little whirlwind of emotion, and yet I want you more than anything in the whole world."

"Oh, I've waited for you all my life," I interrupted wildly. "Now that I've found you at last——"

I didn't finish. His eye caught the photograph staring at us accusingly. He unwound my clinging arms, got up,

and began pacing up and down the taupe carpet. His giant figure was the picture of tragedy.

"I can't think! I can't think! What have you done to me, little Jean?"

He reminded me of a huge oak I had once seen grappling with and resisting a storm.

"I want you, I need you so, Jean, and yet I can't have you!" he murmured in a tortured voice, running his hands through his hair.

Then, just as though he had switched on a strong current of will power, his face grew stonily resolute. He came over to the desk, where I huddled.

"Jean," he explained gently yet firmly, "we can't go on like this. I'm a married man. My duty lies over there." He indicated the photograph. Then he walked over to the window, took several deep breaths, and came back.

"I can't work this morning. Answer my most urgent letters. Tell my clients I've been called out of town. I've got to be alone. I simply must get a grip on myself."

I reached for his hand, but he remonstrated gently.

"Don't, dear! You don't realize what you're doing to me. You set me on fire. I'm going out to my shack. I've got to be alone."

Through a blurred fog, I saw his huge figure hastening through the doorway. He was fighting, resisting me, thrusting me out of his life.

The clock now pointed to nine. A client came in, made inquiries, and departed. Business routine commenced. I dashed ice water over my face. I must keep the office machinery running smoothly. Eventually the day closed.

I hated my room with its mocking dreams. I knew the location of Vernon's shack. Often Roberta and I had hiked past it.

"I will force my happiness! I won't give up!" I vowed as I gritted my teeth and counted the dollar bills in my purse.

I could catch a train that in an hour's time would take me within a mile of Vernon's shack. I would find him, and bring him back to my arms.

Once in the passenger coach, I shivered as I looked out of the window.

As I alighted, the season's first cold wave penetrated my sheer hose and slippers. I wasn't properly dressed for the tramp. But a wild hopefulness goaded me on. If only I could nestle in Vernon's arms in the shack, I felt sure of undermining his will power.

Mocking voices seemed to be jeering at me in reply. I clenched my hands as I raced along the highway, whispering tensely under my breath, "I love him! He's mine! I can't go through life without him! I must have my mate! I will have him!" My body muscles were tense with the conflict between conscience and desire. It was as though I was fighting some physical obstacle.

Motor cars speeded back and forth. I was hobbling along in the mud on the edge of the concrete, to keep from being run over. Some drunken men in a lurching Ford jeered at me as they whizzed past. But I pressed onward, my hands and feet stinging with cold.

I thought for a minute that a tramp was following me, and debated whether or not it would be best to turn back toward the station. Then the huge lights of a motor bus shone directly on a padlocked gate, and I knew I had reached Vernon's shack. Everything was deathly quiet.

In the moonlight I fumbled with the lock. I couldn't move it. I had grown so stiff with the cold that as I attempted to climb over the gate, my arms and legs refused to function properly. I made several failures in securing a footing. Finally, teeth chattering and knees trembling, I scrambled over the top, lost my footing, and sprawled full length in the mud.

My head struck a rock. I lay stunned. Gradually I

became aware of the moon shining into my eyes. I realized dully that unless I exerted all of my will power, I would never find Vernon. Surely the shack could not be far off. If only I could hold out a little longer, I could rest in the shack.

During my fall the heel of my left slipper had been wrenched off. I had torn my hand on some fence wire, and from the painful throbbing over my left temple, I knew that the spot was swelling.

The stars were out, but I ached too much to notice their beauty. I wished now that I had eaten something before I had left New York. Clumping along, I fell down again, weak from overexertion and lack of food. As I huddled momentarily against a tree, I thought I saw a light coming from the shack. I hobbled toward it hopefully. Evidently it had been merely a reflection. It was pitch dark inside, as I peered through a window. And I couldn't find traces of a motor car.

My heart felt like lead. Vernon, no doubt, had already gone. In a sort of frenzy I pictured his home-coming. No doubt his capable wife would have an excellent hot dinner waiting, his home would be immaculate, and his children spotless and well-behaved.

But, would Vernon Bond's wife come bouncing down the stairway two steps at a time to be swooped up in his strong arms in the joy of reunion? Could he thrill to her lips as he would to mine if it were I to whom he was coming home?

"Oh, what a heaven of a home he and I could have," I whispered enviously. In spite of my bitter thoughts, the mere memory of his kisses that morning started a tingling sensation all through my body.

Then I began to cry, comparing myself to trapped wild animals waiting for death. My impetuous, weary pilgrimage had been futile. My head throbbed incessantly. I de-

cided to lie down on the porch floor. Perhaps if I lay very quiet the throbbing in my head would stop. The moonlight seemed to be mocking me.

I grew drowsy. Among my disconnected thoughts, voices seemed to be jeering, "Call this forcing happiness?" I opened my eyes, and saw Vernon's anxious face bending above me.

"You're here," I whispered. "Nothing else matters."

I closed my eyes again. Something pungent was being held to my nostrils. I began to feel stronger immediately.

"What happened, darling?" I asked. "I thought you had gone."

"I was out in the woods, Jean. Got back just a few minutes ago and found you sprawled on the floor. I'll get you some more coffee."

He brought back a steaming cup from the stove, and I gulped it down. His haggard face distressed me.

"You're worried," I cried out.

"How do you feel, Jean?" he asked, ignoring my solicitude for him.

"I'm fine now," I lied courageously. I couldn't bear to worry him further.

He didn't even touch my hand after I had finished the coffee. I could see his iron will taking possession of him again. He began, "Jean, we can't stay here all night, together."

"Why not?" I protested. Yet even as I uttered the words, I realized that for the time being it would be futile to oppose him. His strong will was uppermost now. He would dominate me.

He looked at his watch. "It's only eight o'clock. I can easily get you home in two hours if you feel strong enough."

At that I stormed, "After I've walked a whole mile out here to see you."

"Jean, listen to me," he asked pleadingly. And then he reasoned in a strained, unnatural voice, "Don't you see that we can't go on like this? Buck up, Jean, and I'll take you home. Think a minute——"

But I interrupted him, beating the pillows on the couch with my clenched fists. "Vernon Bond, haven't you any heart at all?"

He started toward me then, his eyes hungry and pain shot. He stopped, white and resolute. His iron will had again gripped his heart.

"Jean, we've got to leave, child. Don't look at me like that. You're driving me mad."

He didn't finish. He turned away from me and almost ran out of the room.

I heard him starting the motor of the car. "Jean," he called in a hoarse voice. He was resisting me.

"Oh, I'm sick of living!" I rebelled aloud, glaring at the rough walls, plank flooring, and crude furniture. "This room might have been Paradise with just us two here, alone in the woods."

"Come, Jean," Vernon was calling again, louder. There was near-desperation in his voice.

I entered his car unwillingly, every cell in my body crying out for his love. But he steeled himself against me. We sat in starved silence as the car raced back to New York. In less than two hours I was back home. I got out without saying good-by. I stood in the shadow of my doorway, watching his car disappear around the corner.

For three days Vernon was away on business, and not one word did I hear from him.

On the fourth morning, I was going down town to business. It was during the rush hour. I was standing listlessly in the crowded subway train, fighting dizziness, as passengers jostled each other while they tried to cling to straps.

My trip to the shack had affected me like a long illness. We were approaching the Pennsylvania Station. The car lurched, and I had difficulty in keeping on my feet. Then suddenly my heart began hammering. Vernon, my mate, was back in New York! He was entering my car. I could not prevent a gasp of joy and surprise from escaping me.

I forgot my resolutions, Roberta's warnings, as I made my way through the crowd and clung to his warm throbbing fingers that so often had closed over mine. He turned white.

"You've been sick," he exclaimed in concern. "Lean on me, Jean." He gripped my arm firmly. I was grateful for his support. As we neared his office, he commanded, "Jean, I've got to talk to you."

"Yes," I nodded, his nearness affecting me like wine. All the old tumultuous throbbing broke out afresh, only wilder, stronger than ever before. Vernon was here, beside me, pulsating with desire for me. Nothing else mattered.

I never knew how we climbed the subway steps to the street. My heart was pounding furiously. It was heavenly just to walk beside him in the shelter of his towering shoulders. They were like a giant tree and would shield me from any storm.

He guided me to a parking station. "Get into my car, Jean," he said. I obeyed. "I'll be back in a minute. Have to call up the office." He hurried into a telephone booth.

Soon he took his seat at the wheel. I knew that whatever he asked me to do, I would be so much plastic clay in his hands. He didn't caress me. We skirted silently along back streets, to avoid congested traffic.

"Where are we going?" I asked timidly, clutching at his coat sleeve.

"Be patient a little longer, Jean," he urged.

I thought of the girls I had heard about, who had gone to destruction. I was motoring, I knew not where, with a

married man. Something cataclysmic might lie just ahead. Roberta's warnings, like insistent voices, were reproaching me.

Yet I thrilled at his nearness, and defied the world. "He's mine! I don't care if Hades itself explodes and destroys me. I would rather die than stay out of his arms."

Presently New York lay behind us. In all this time we had not exchanged one word. We were motoring alongside a deserted pasture. Then Vernon turned a solemn face to me.

"Jean, do you know what has happened?"

I looked timidly into his tense face, renunciation engraved indelibly there. Heartbreak seized me as I sobbed brokenly, "Yes, I know what has happened. I can't live without you. If I've got to suffer like the last three days, I hope I can die."

"Jean," he cried out, "do you care as much as that?"

I couldn't articulate. My chin was quivering. My lips were trembling. I worshiped him. A great humility gripped me. I would have placed my head on the block for him, had he desired it.

He parked the car alongside the road, behind some shrubbery and a group of maples that acted as a screen. Near by down the hill, on the outskirts of town, a white house with green shutters stood out distinctly among snug suburban homes. It had a rare atmosphere all its own. At first I couldn't analyze the effect it had on me. And then I recognized its importance. It radiated the very essence of repose. The yard was beautifully landscaped. Several tall elms spread their branches over the house, like comforting arms pronouncing a benediction. The many windows with their crisp curtains and uniformly drawn shades were like so many welcoming smiles.

A lump rose in my throat as I studied the place. It must have taken at least three generations to have mellowed the

house, and to have brought the trees and shrubbery to their present state of perfection.

On the lawn a laughing boy and girl frolicked in a swing, their sturdy little legs exercising up and down, as they climbed higher and higher. A collie was excitedly barking up at them.

I began to envy the people who lived in this restful place. Beyond the children lay a garden, a profusion of chrysanthemums and goldenglow reflecting the sunshine. A capable looking woman was standing near the fence with shears and basket, cutting blooms for her neighbor. Both women were smiling.

Vernon, chin in hand, sat studying the home intently. He was the picture of tragedy. I shut my eyes tightly for a moment. I couldn't bear to witness his pain. When I searched his face again, I fumbled with a certainty.

"Vernon," I faltered, "are those your children in the swing?"

"Yes," he nodded, his voice scarcely more than a husky whisper. How could I have forgotten their claims on him the night I followed him to the shack!

"And the woman gathering flowers—is she—your wife?"

"Yes, Jean."

Roberta's warnings were stalking through my brain. "Jean, be careful." I turned wistfully to Vernon again.

"Do you work in the garden down there?"

"Yes. It's taken me years to get the shrubs and flowers in their present shape. I've ordered two hundred tulip bulbs to put out this fall. When they bloom next spring——"

He didn't finish. He just sat there, drinking in the peacefulness of that white house at the foot of the hill.

For a few minutes neither of us spoke a word. Then, as if talking to himself, Vernon spoke very softly. "Two years ago I had a chance to double my income. It meant

giving up my home down there. I turned it down. See those bird houses near the garage? I made them during winter evenings."

The awfulness of what I had been trying to do overwhelmed me. I began to realize how selfish I had been. I had expected Vernon to give up his home, when every growing thing on the place was dear to him. How silly I had been to imagine that my love could make up for the loss of all this! A hundred swords seemed to be cutting into my heart when I realized that I must give Vernon up. Roberta would help me get away—any place would do.

"Don't you see, Jean, why I couldn't let you stay in the shack all night?" His voice was very gentle. "Don't you see what it would cost me? It has taken me years to build up my reputation for stability here."

The longer I sat there, the deeper became my conviction that I didn't really love him if I allowed myself to wreck his future. I couldn't take him away from his family and home.

I clung to him then for only a moment, burrowing my hands up inside his shirt sleeves, caressing his warm, pulsating flesh. My lips clung desperately.

Only a squirrel interrupted our solitude. On a near-by corn shuck a crow was cawing. Otherwise we were quite alone. I understood now why he had brought me here. Because I loved him, I would have to give him up. He would gradually forget me, if I left no address behind.

"Please take me home, Vernon," I pleaded.

I intended to see Roberta as soon as we reached New York, borrow enough money for my fare and go forth. I would leave that very afternoon. Roberta would never tell Vernon where I had gone.

Vernon looked at me thoughtfully, and started the car. We shot along the road, headed for New York.

"Don't you feel well, Jean?" he asked in a worried voice.

"I wanted to talk things over with you, but I'll wait until to-morrow if——"

"I can't talk to-day," I interrupted, a big lump rising in my throat.

By to-morrow I would be miles away from him, removing temptation from us both. I ached to kiss him just once more, but I fought down the impulse. It would only make parting more difficult. We motored along in silence.

When we reached my home, I whispered, "I can't go back to the office to-day. Please see Roberta in the morning, will you?"

He was all tenderness again. "I'll come up to your apartment after office hours this afternoon, and see how you're feeling," he said.

"No, please don't," I begged.

I knew that a train for the West left at five. I wanted to be away from him as far as possible when he learned that I had gone. I could feel the tears gathering as I looked into his eyes for the last time. I was weakening in spite of myself. So I stepped quickly out of his car.

"Good-by," I whispered, hurrying away from him. From my doorway I watched his car turn around the corner. Then very slowly, because tears blinded me, I climbed up to my room, and began packing my trunk.

IV

Dangerous Innocence

AS I lay back in the glorious sunshine of this morning the idea first came to me to write the story of the three of us—how from the different ends of the earth we came together, how we sinned and how we paid. They were with me this morning—the first time we all have been together for so long. Nick was sitting on the grass by my couch, holding my hand. Sometimes he would kiss each finger tip, in the old, gently gay manner. But it isn't the same Nick, something has been stricken from his face. And Bessie—old, haggard Bessie who watches him with burning eyes of hate. Ah—those two—they are breaking my heart. I love them so, I do so want them to be happy. But life now will never be quite the same. There will always be memories. Black, hideous memories. I must make myself strong and well to help those two because I know they are going to suffer much more than I. I wonder why it is so—I sinned as badly as they. Perhaps God has given me strength where there once was weakness, because it is not right that we should let one sin completely spoil the rest of our life. If He doesn't take that life away from us, He means us to carry on, and to make it doubly beautiful. Remember that, you who have sinned. I don't know why I speak with such authority, but the conviction is strong within me.

If I succeed in getting this down on paper—there might be whines and whimpers all through it. I hate people who whine—you do too. But be—be, at least, patient with me.

And where shall I begin? There isn't any definite place.

The first part of my life isn't especially interesting, except that it was unbelievably good for the things I did later. It was a normal sane life guided by a wonderful mother, a mother who was a gay, blithe spirit, an adorable companion, and so beautiful!

I must tell you, though, of a discovery I made quite early in my life. It is impressively vivid in my mind. It seems incredible that I should have so completely forgotten it later. I had been reading "Her Promise," that sweetest, most adorable love story in the world. I hugged the book when I had finished and cried over it a bit. I wonder, I said dreamily, to myself, if ever a lover like the hero will come to me. From the back of my mind came the answer. Yes, if you make yourself as good and fine as Hélène is. I believed it—I still believe it. "Give to the world the best you have and the best will come back to you." I have read that just lately, but I hadn't then, and I said very nearly those same words. Out of that answer an ideal was born. And that ideal saw me safely through school.

Because I had a mother who never said crossly that I wouldn't understand, or that nice girls did not think of such things, when I asked questions, I had a clearer, cleaner outlook than most girls of my age. And I had discovered a most curious fact. A man, to be good, should not cheat or lie. He should not stoop to a mean, dishonorable action. He should not betray his friends or a confidence. He must be brave and just. But all a woman needed to be good, was —to be virtuous! I knew it was, of course, an important part. But there were *ten* commandments, all of equal value, and they were for women as well as for men. So when I meant to be good to deserve that lover, I meant all that that simple word should mean.

That decision influenced my actions for years. I do not mean that I was unbearably good, or a pious holier-than-thou person. But I did not cheat or lie. Several times I fought a

hard battle with myself to tell the truth, when a little lie would have pulled me out of a scrape. I tried always to be fair and generous minded. I tried not to be thoughtlessly selfish. And I never gossiped nor talked to hurt a person's character. I never would have tried so hard to deserve the best if I had not read that book. I would have lived a good life, if I had stayed home in that decent, clean environment. But I left for an environment that was not clean, and the weaknesses in me proved strongest.

This part should properly begin with my ambition. It is usually the making or breaking of most of us. I am a splendid actress. I really have the gift. The manager of our stock company discovered it long before I left high school. Ah—but I had such ambition in those days, such a healthy joyous zest for life. Naturally possessing the talent I did, my dream had always been the great metropolis. And because my mother believed in my talent, believed in my goodness and strength, she let me go. I was in Chicago only a week when I signed a contract for work in a southern stock company. I know now that it was remarkable, my getting work so soon. But I didn't then. It was right that I should get work. I could do it. And life was right anyhow, and beautiful too. Had it not given me beauty and talent and the will to make the most of it?

My stay in that lovely southern town was a pleasant period of hard work. I was popular. I gave to my audience the best I had in me. Not one disagreeable incident marked that period.

When the season ended and I reached Chicago again I was glowing with anticipation. Where would next season find me? What people would I meet? And would he be there? It was then the last part of May. I did not want summer stock so I went home for a few weeks. Returning about the middle of June, I couldn't bear the thought of a hotel. So I hunted and found a tiny adorable apartment.

Oh, but I was happy in it that first week. The enthusiastic descriptions that I wrote home to Mother! I loved to take out my key in the elevator, and ask Jack if the maid had cleaned "my place" yet. I always had such a lovely possessive feeling as I fitted the key into the lock. This, I would think, as I flung open the door, this, is my kingdom.

But one day my feet lagged a bit going home. I didn't take my key out in the elevator. I was sort of heartsick as I unlocked my door. For a while it evaded me, that vague, troubled feeling. Finally I found it. I was lonesome. I did not know a soul in Chicago, and I needed someone. Someone to appreciate my kingdom, to enjoy it with me.

I suppose this new lonesomeness made my smile more friendly and eager. Anyhow, the next day, at one of the agencies, a lovely blonde girl responded to it. And that I think was the beginning that led to the end.

She went home with me that afternoon and all the old joy was there as I flung open the door to my apartment, snapped on the softly shaded lights and offered her a cigarette. She gazed admiringly around my place. "This is lovely," she smiled at me, "you must have money."

At any other time I would have resented her easy familiarity, but I was too happy in having found a friend. "I have quite a bit," I admitted, "but not enough to live here without working."

"It *is* terrible having to work," she said, with an inviting smile, and I looked at her in surprise. I had not meant that I did not want to work, but that my work would take me out of Chicago and I would hate to give up my apartment. I explained this to her. She said "of course" and turned to other subjects.

Now I can see how cleverly and successfully she drew me out. In half an hour I had told her all about my life and ambitions. I even told her of the lover I knew was waiting

for me somewhere. She was so sweet, so sympathetic, she understood so well. I did not know that it was part of her business to understand. Later, when I found out, I did not blame her. I don't now. She had to live. And life in a big city is simply a case of the survival of the fittest, when you're alone and penniless.

She told me that she had not worked for a long time, that she had been very sick. But she said: "I have a tiny income, and," with a rueful smile, "I manage to live within it."

There was something about that smile that went straight to my heart. All the while she was talking about other things a thought kept buzzing through my head. At last I broke out eagerly: "Why can't you live here with me until I go away? It will surely be a month. You'll have no expenses, and you can spend your money for some new clothes." She wouldn't think of it, she said, and I was in a panic of fear. I couldn't live alone again, I just couldn't. "Please, please," I begged her. "I need you, I'll just die if you don't say yes." And finally she consented to come.

I was delighted. I danced around like a child. I'd have someone with me now always. Someone to share everything.

"But," she said, after I had quieted down a bit, "I have friends and of course I would want to see them." Her voice trailed off questioningly.

"Of course you would," I cried, "and I want friends too. Loads of them. So bring them on."

"You're a lovely little thing," was all she said, but it was enough. From then on I wanted Bessie to approve and admire me.

Then began the slow, insidious undermining of my morals. She told me things that shocked me into tears. I don't know why she did it, but I suppose my belief in the goodness of life irritated her. When I was aghast that such things

should be, she laughed at me cruelly and it hurt me.

She and her friends teased me unmercifully because I would not drink. When several times I helped girls with money and friendship she was indignant and contemptuous, and told me of things that had been done to her. "They're laughing at you," she told me, "they are just out for all they can get—and they're using you for a fool." That was the nearest she dared come to actually calling me a fool. "But," I told her, "I'd rather be fooled by *nine* of them, and really help the tenth, than to turn them all away and miss that *one.*"

"Don't let anyone hear you say that," she said scathingly. "If you do they'll send you to an asylum."

And finally I began to listen to her and to mind the jeers of her friends. When I frowned in distaste at some of their stories, they winked at each other and laughed patronizingly. And oh, how I'd like to start preaching to all the girls in the world, to tell them always to hug close all the things that are fine and decent in themselves. Let people laugh and jeer, but before you loosen your hold see clearly what kind of people they are who laugh. Don't try to blind your eyes with excuses for them. Don't tell yourself that they're not *really bad.* Remember that right is right and wrong is wrong. As you grow older you'll adjust yourself to life, and you'll see clearly the in-between shades. But life has to *teach* you those things, mellow you to a kindly understanding. I can't say it as vehemently as I mean it. But just hold tight, hold fast. You might be dropped, go back to the old loneliness, but you'll never regret it. I *know.*

And so Bessie's friends came into my life. And how easily I slipped into their ways. All my fine ideals and principles—crumbling away at the first assault. They drank too much, those friends, talked too much, kissed too much. And I suspected them of greater indiscretions than that. But I said to myself, so long as they behaved themselves

when they were with me, what they did at other times was none of my business.

And then one night the thing happened, the thing that was to be expected. We had no engagement and rather welcomed a quiet evening. I was half tempted not to answer the bell when it rang. I did not even put aside my book—I was determined not to go out. I wonder what difference it would have made. None, I guess. Badness, like murder, will out. Bessie answered the bell and I gave her a despairing smile when I heard the voices.

"It's Harold and Ted," she laughed, "now try and get rid of them."

"That's right—*try*," Ted said. "But you can't, because you're going with us. We're having a party—a big one. All the butter'n egg men in town."

We laughed at him, and told him we wouldn't go, couldn't go, asked him where was the party, and who would be there—told him if we did go we'd have to be home early. The party was at Harold's suite at the hotel. I hesitated and Ted threw up his hands. "My heavens," he said mockingly, "little Miss Purity wouldn't think of going to a man's room. You have parties here, don't you, what's the difference?"

"There isn't any difference," I snapped at him. "Whatever made you think I thought there was?"

"She's improving," he said, turning to Bessie. "Maybe," doubtfully, "we'll make a sport of her yet. You know," lifting my face with his fingers, "you're too darn lovely to be a prude."

And I, silly fool, actually glowed at his admiration. There was something singularly attractive about Ted, with his broad shoulders and indolent air that concealed a keen, clever intellect. To be a sport commenced to have its attractions.

When we arrived the party was merry and mad. Some were drunk, the rest half drunk. I did not drink. All I

needed was excitement and company and I could be as hilarious as the most drunken one. I ignored the frank spooning, the ribald remarks. When one of the boys tried to pull me into his lap I slapped his face. That sort of stuff, I told him, was bunk—what I really felt was a horrible disgust, but I would rather have died than to have any of them know it. You remember I wanted to be a good sport.

When things quieted down a bit, I looked around for Bessie—and I found her—stretched seemingly lifeless on the bathroom floor. She looked terrible, with her hair all over her face and her mouth open. Everything that was decent in me shrank away from her, but the part of me that was striving to be a "good sport" spoke.

"Want to see a pretty sight?" I called. "Then come here and look at this." They came and looked. After they had laughed themselves weak, someone threw a glass of water in her face. She opened her eyes and tried to sit up. Oh, but she looked old—old as sin—and as horrible. "I'm drunk," she muttered. "And I'm sick." I pushed them out at that, and during the next half hour my ambition to become a sport died. I fully made up my mind that, as soon as Bessie was in any condition to leave, I was going home. If I had only stuck to it. But I didn't. Bessie begged me not to leave her. The others told me I was a pretty poor sort to leave a friend in that condition. I knew I shouldn't leave. They were right.

It was long after midnight then and the party was beginning to get sleepy. But I did not notice their going. I was too busy with Bessie. First she would cry, then she'd laugh, then she'd curse like a trooper—and then she'd be sick. When at last she was too weak to do anything but whimper and insist that Harold hold her hand, I sank exhausted into a chair. There was no glamour and attraction about that crowd then. I loathed them all and myself more. I was dimly aware that Ted was regarding me keenly. I

looked at him startled. There were little flickering pin points of light in his eyes. Wearily I got up. "Get me a taxi," I ordered. "I guess I can get her home now."

Slowly Ted walked toward me. I knew there was going to be trouble, and the whole of me braced for the shock. "You are not going home, sweetheart," he said softly. "You are going to stay here—with me."

I do not know what I would have done if I had not been so tired. What I did do was cry. I know I talked between sobs. I remember his suave, pleasant voice, pleading, coaxing. Finally he made a gesture of defeat. "All right, kiddie," he said, "I thought it was all a pose." I looked up at him and knew I had nothing to fear. He might be a cad and a libertine, but he couldn't be a brute. He valued his dignity and poise too much for that. I lay back in my chair and he put a blanket over me and tucked a pillow behind my head. "It is after five," he said. "Try and get a nap." I heard him moving about the room. "I'm going now," he whispered, "but I'll be back in time to take you home."

I lay there exhausted, my body rigid and numb. I could not have moved to save my life. But my brain was wide awake. And during that awful time, when they thought I was fast asleep, I learned to what depths of degradation human beings can go. I was afraid to stir, paralyzed with horror, sickened with fury. Finally, I slept.

Something cold on my face awoke me. Harold was holding a glass of water to my lips. "You were choking and sobbing," he said. "Go bathe your face, and I'll have some breakfast sent up."

"I don't want any breakfast here," I said. "I'm going home."

When I got into the bathroom Bessie was there. She saw me stiffen at the sight of her. She started to say something, but I told her to keep still and I saw her give me a sarcastic smile. We made ourselves presentable in silence,

and then I went into the other room for my hat and coat. Harold stretched and yawned as I came into the room. "I've ordered breakfast," he said and looked at me for approval. I did not say anything, I couldn't. I wanted to scratch his face to pieces. While I was putting on my hat a knock sounded. "The waiter," Harold nodded and sauntered to the door.

But it wasn't the waiter. It was a small, steely-eyed man, who looked at me contemptuously, and stood with his back to the door. In a crisp voice he enlightened us as to who he was. The house detective! I can't go into details about that awful time. The brutal biting words. The vision of court and jail and the newspapers at home. Of Mother and my friends. I don't know how I lived through it. That man made us go down to the manager's office. It was the same awful scene. Bessie was defiant and Harold blustered. And I—I just sat like one turned to stone. When, quite calmly, they called me a prostitute, I moaned aloud. That they should suspect me of that. I thought that they were a bit sorry for me, because both the manager and the detective ignored Bessie—as a hopeless case, I guess—and talked directly to me. They thought it was the first time and they were determined to teach me a lesson. Somehow they let us go. I don't remember getting home. I just remember flinging myself on the bed.

When I awoke it was night. Great black waves seemed to be breaking over me—and receding—breaking and receding. After awhile I struggled back to consciousness—and remembered. I turned over and buried my head in the pillow. But it was over—I was out of it, thank God! Never again would I get myself into such a predicament. I heard a movement by the bed and turned over. Bess was looking at me speculatively. "Irene," she said, gazing at the end of her cigarette, "unless Harold and Ted can fix it up—we've got to go to court—at least."

The blood seemed to congeal in my veins. And I thought I was out of it. It was ages before I caught my breath. And then I think I went mad. I laughed, I shrieked, I rocked back and forth. I didn't cry. If I had, it probably would have relieved my tortured nerves and made me normal. I got up, bathed and dressed, in the same bitter, cynical mood. If I'd been what they said, if I deserved what I thought I was going to get—and that night I took my first drink in the hope of getting rid of the gnawing shame of my conscience. The crowd was uproarious in its approval. Ted frowned at first and then grew enthusiastic. "A bit of wine," he said, "and you are so lovely that you take my breath away." I knew that I was lovely. My hair that always curled in soft and shining ringlets, lay damp over my white forehead. I could feel the moist glow of my eyes. "Ted, Ted," I laughed up at him. "Do you really like me better a wee bit drunk?" "Yes," he said, and there was a tense note under his light words. "Much better—I am getting on myself now." I saw him send Bessie a triumphant questioning look and I saw her nod quietly. But it didn't strike me as particularly significant. I didn't think about it more than a few seconds.

I went home that night as drunk as Bessie had ever been—and I kept it up. When Ted told me that we would hear nothing more of the affair at the hotel, I was intensely grateful to him. But I didn't stop drinking. It wasn't because I had the habit. I hated the stuff—the taste I mean. It was because—oh, I don't know why—I just didn't.

I neglected my work, my mother. For days I didn't write to her. Then I'd get her frantic, questioning letters. What she must have gone through! For a while I'd write to her regularly. I told her I wasn't working, couldn't get work. It bothered me awfully for a while, telling her those lies. But I kept saying to myself that to-morrow I'd start. But the next day I was too tired or had an important engage-

ment. Any excuse served me. Through it all, though, I kept physically clean. There were many who tired to maul me when they thought I was too drunk to care. But all I had to do was to call Ted. Usually he took those men by the necks and doused their heads under a faucet. So after awhile I was left alone.

Then one noon I woke up terribly depressed. I remembered something unpleasant had happened yesterday afternoon. I remembered, too, that Ted had looked serious. A letter! I had promised to give it serious thought when I was sober. What was it? In a blinding flash it came to me. The bank had notified me that I had overdrawn. I had not a cent in the world. Frantically I scrambled out of bed.

"Bessie, Bessie!" I screamed.

She came to the door and looked at me in surprise.

"What was the letter I opened yesterday afternoon and showed to Ted?" I gasped. There was still the possibility that it was all a horrible nightmare.

"That letter," she said nonchalantly, "was simply a notification that you were broke and in debt."

I gazed at her speechless, and then covered my face with my hands.

"Why worry," she said. "There is always—Ted."

I turned on her in a fury. "I'm not quite as rotten as that."

"Then what are you going to do?" she asked. I started to speak, but she made a motion for me to be quiet. She took a cigarette, and leaning back in her chair, inhaled deeply. "Suppose we have it out," she suggested. I said nothing. She went on. "In the first place, my pretty child, you have served well. From the minute you smiled at me in that office I knew what I was going to do. I meant to live here with you—on you. If you hadn't suggested it, although I knew you would, I would have come to you with some hard luck story that you could not have resisted—I was

broke. At the end of my rope. Getting to be a has-been.

"You've put me on my feet. I've rejuvenated myself at your expense. The proper care and food that I've had here have taken ten years from my face. Harold is in love with me. You must have suspected where I got my clothes, Oh, I forgot," she laughed mockingly. "That you thought I had an income. Well, I knew what I was doing when I brought Ted here. He always liked delicate orchid-like girls. Even if I didn't get a meal ticket, I intended that you should—and I'd share. Now you're at the end of your rope. Well—I can't help you. I'm getting old. Harold will probably tire of me soon. And I'm saving every cent I can. You can get work. Look at yourself. As I said before, why worry—there is always Ted. And," she finished, cruelly, "somehow I don't think you'll want to go home."

I listened to her dully. I hadn't the strength to be angry. I was desperate, bewildered, unable to think of anything but the shame of being in debt to the bank. I forgot all else. I liked Ted; perhaps I might even learn to love him. It wouldn't matter anyhow, nothing mattered much. "Call him up," I said bitterly, "I don't care."

Ted came, and he and Bessie made all arrangements. I listened. But I wasn't very interested. Bessie and I were to keep the apartment in our names. We must consider public opinion. I laughed at that. Also my mother. I didn't laugh then. But there was to be another apartment. He'd let Bessie know a day ahead of time and he was to see that I went over there. Bessie was to take care of me. Ted would be away a lot. Business—was the excuse. When Bessie had me looking healthy and normal, she would get a check, a big fat one, in fact she could fill it in herself. For expenses, in the meantime—he handed me a folded check.

When Bessie left the room Ted swept me into his arms. "If I were a better man," he said, "I couldn't do this. But I love you—want you." I did not respond to his kiss.

Neither did I feel any reversion. Nothing mattered anyhow.

I must somehow bridge the gap between that night and what came later. But I don't quite know how to do it. Ted left me immediately that night. I did not see him again for nearly two weeks. By the time he came back I was looking much better. Bessie had taken wonderful care of me. She had been terribly stern and unbelievably strict. But I hadn't minded. I wanted to be led. I wanted to be bossed. I had always been used to it. And just two weeks of normal, right living brought back that luminous, transparent tint to my skin, cleared my eyes and straightened up the droop of my shoulders. Bessie actually denied herself. She refused all invitations and when I couldn't sleep she read to me. I wrote Mother every day. Listless, dull letters, I'm afraid they were, but mothers seem satisfied, and she went into raptures over the gifts I sent her.

Then Ted came back. I knew after he left that I was doomed. Never shall I forget the searing, scorching shame. What I cannot understand is why I didn't run away—go home—or jump into the river. But I hadn't improved as much as I should have when he came home again. I knew what the trouble was, so did Bessie and Ted. It was the awful dread of him coming again, and it worried him. As I write this it comes to me that Ted could have made a very wonderful man. He never suggested marriage. I wouldn't have married him anyway, though that sounds terrible. It is true but I don't know why. When he left that time he told Bessie that I was to go out and enjoy myself.

I wouldn't go at first; I didn't want to. She fairly had to drag me up to Casey's. I think I should explain a bit about Casey. His place was, I suppose, what is called a "speak-easy." But such a wonderful one. Casey himself was a genial old soul and he loved young people. You never found any old men with their stenographers at Casey's. There wasn't any love-making, in secluded corners. You

couldn't get in there just because you happened to hear of the place. If you had a friend you wanted to bring, Casey first met that friend at a luncheon or dinner. And if he didn't like him or her, you'd just better not invite that friend. If you wanted to dance you could, if you wanted to hear exquisite music, you could. There was a wonderful old library where you could read to your heart's content. I loved Casey's.

I had just two highballs, Bessie let me, and they made me drunk. Two had never bothered me before and I was awfully sorry. I was afraid Ted would hear of it and be cross with her. I was so happy—the world seemed rosy again. Casey told me I seemed more like the child I was when he first knew me. I just had to hug him. I tried to play bridge but I couldn't. I laughed and talked too much. No one got angry, though. I'd never seen anyone angry at Casey's. Someone suggested that we dance, "because it wouldn't matter how much I laughed and talked then."

I was having a gorgeous time, dancing, when I heard above the music a shout of joy from Casey. I stopped dancing, everyone did, to see what was the matter. Casey was vigorously shaking hands with a tall, broad-shouldered man who was standing by the door. How his old face beamed! It seemed good to see someone so unaffectedly glad. I laughed, a bubbling, joyous laugh that came right from my heart. And then the bluest eyes I ever saw were looking straight into mine—and the whole world hushed. A flame came into my eyes and I saw an answering flame in his. My heart called out: "It's you," and his answered me. I knew my hands fluttered out to him. I knew he started to come to me. His eyes were shining and I saw his lips say: "Sweetheart." Then someone shouted: "Nick," and those blue eyes were blotted out.

I was weak and dizzy, and my heart was beating like a trip hammer. It was my lover! He had found me—come

to me. And there would never be any more sorrow. I didn't think of Ted, or what he meant. I kept saying over and over, "Thank you, dear God, thank you for sending him." I knew there was an excited buzz of conversation. I gathered that he had been away a long time. But all I could think of was that he is here—and he knew me—we won't have to pretend—we know—we know. Casey ordered drinks for everyone. "A toast," he said, "to a dear friend, whose father was the best sportsman that ever lived."

And then he was coming toward me with Casey. I went to meet him, as simply as a child, and put both my hands in his. For a minute he looked at me wonderingly, as if he couldn't believe his eyes. Then he raised my hands to his lips and kissed them. Not the backs, he turned them over; they fitted into one of his, uncurled my fingers, and reverently put his lips against the palms. A quiver of ecstasy coursed through the whole of me. Casey started to speak and then he stopped. He, too, grew very still, and there was a wonderful, awed light in his old eyes—as if he had seen something holy.

The music started, smilingly he held out his arms. Glory be! It was a waltz. A haunting, fragrant thing, deep with love. He held me lightly, but sometimes he bent his head and put his face in my hair. "Your name is Irene?" he asked. I nodded. Once when someone nearly bumped into us he drew me close, protectingly. For a moment neither of us moved. That quick contact numbed us. So we stood, my face lightly against his shoulder, his bent into my hair.

I don't remember, clearly, the rest of that evening. Everything I do remember is of Ted. I know Casey took some of us up to his own rooms. I sat on the sofa with my head on Bessie's shoulder and my hand in Nick's. I can feel now his lips against my finger tips. A soft, gentle caress. Sometimes he laid my palm against his cheek. There

is a dim echo of his words in my mind: "Bessie, you must not let her drink. She is so sweet—so sweet," than again, "but I've found her now. I won't let her—isn't her hair lovely, Bessie—she is so good, so good—we must take care of her, mustn't we, Bessie?"

When we decided to go home he helped me with my wraps and carried me downstairs. He was afraid that it wasn't just sleepiness. The dear nearness of him was so wonderful it hurt, and when he put his lips at the hollow of my throat, I grew faint. He directed the chauffeur to go by way of the park. "You need some fresh air," he explained gently. That air was good. He told me to breathe deeply, and I took in great gulps of it. And all the time I just looked at him. I couldn't seem to look enough. His face was so clean, so sort of boyish. But withal there was the look of the man about it—in the stern, straight cut of his lips, the squareness of his jaw. But his eyes were young, young, and they dreamed over me and looked adoringly. He had taken off his hat and the wind blew a lock of hair over his forehead. It was lovely hair, thick with the slightest wave. I wanted to smooth it back. I know I started to, and an unaccountable shyness seized me. He saw me flush and his hand closed tightly over mine. I even fancied that he caught his breath sharply.

I wasn't sorry when we reached home; wanted to dream over it, and pray. I did too, and Bessie turned sharply away. I wanted to write to Mother, and I did that. I didn't tell her about *him,* I couldn't. But I knew she would sense that I was heavenly happy. Before Nick left he took my face in both his hands. "To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow."

Bessie was strangely gentle as she helped me undress. Once I looked at her and there were tears in her eyes. I flung my arms around her neck. "I love you, too," I told her. She caught me close. "Dear girl," I heard her murmur, and

there was an unfathomable sadness in her voice. I did not understand it, but I was too happy with my thoughts of Nick, to think of it long. Not once did I think of Ted. Not once during the next two exquisite weeks did I think of what I had done. I know it sounds impossible, but please, please believe me. My mind and heart were too full of Nick and love to leave room for evil, unpleasant things.

Bessie awoke me. It was almost three o'clock, and the sun bathed my room in glory. "You have only half an hour," she said. "Nick just phoned." I scrambled out of bed and rushed to the wardrobe. "What shall I wear, Bessie, what shall I wear?"

"Your gray and yellow," she told me gravely, but there was a hint of laughter and tears in her voice.

I drew it out and laid it on the bed. It was a lovely thing, that dress. Its soft gray pleated skirt was on a blouse of gayest yellow. There were great full sleeves that were banded tight at the wrist, and a brightly embroidered bolero jacket was worn with it. I had a silk coat to match the gray and a felt hat to match the yellow. A great pond-lily bud came from under the tiny brim and rested against my cheek.

"And those antique amethyst bracelets," I said. "What are you going to wear, Bessie—that dull blue velvet thing with the mink fur? And you can wear the sapphire and pearl set that Mother sent me." I looked at her triumphantly—how could anyone resist such a combination?

"But I'm not going," she said in a queer voice.

"You are, you are," I told her. When she hesitated I pleaded with her. "Please, please, Bessie. I want you to."

She drew my bath and then slipped into her dress. When I came out, scrubbed and shining, she was all ready. I dressed rapturously. I was glad, glad that my feet were as small and slender as my hands. That my body was sweet and white. I was ready long before my half hour was up.

"Bessie," I asked anxiously, "am I really beautiful?"

For answer she drew me over to the mirror. And I stared at a girl—slender and as exquisitely formed as a nymph. Great tawny, black-fringed eyes looked from under delicately arched brows. A perfectly oval face with white skin of satin texture, and a red, eager little mouth. I was really beautiful. Bessie had brushed and curled my hair and now it lay in set shining ringlets close over my head. A bit dazed I put my hands to pull the curls over my ears.

"Don't," Bessie said. "I like the tips of your ears to show."

"You don't think my skirts are too short?" I asked her.

"No," she answered, and there was a motherly, personal pride in her voice. "Your legs are lovely, slim and long like a child's."

And then the bell rang. Quite suddenly all the panic in my heart was stilled. Everything was all right. He was here. When he came in he glanced quickly at me and then he spoke to Bessie. There was a lovely old-world courtesy in the way he did it. Bessie, you could see by his manner, was hostess, lady of the house, and respects must be paid to her first. Then he came to me. I stood still and watched him cross the room. At last he was in front of me, looking down at me, his hands clasped behind him.

"I have been afraid," he said, "that you were just a lovely dream. No," he amended, "not a dream, a mirage, something, you know, that a man has sought for so long, his mind creates it for his eyes to see."

I bent my head back and looked into his eyes. There was nothing to say. He knew and I knew. There wasn't going to be any silly subterfuge. He drew my hand through his arm and we went to the sofa. He drew out his cigarettes and lit one for me. "Where," I asked eagerly, "are we going?"

"Where do you want to go, dearest?" he smiled at me.

"Drive to a lovely place I know of on the Lake and dine there, or see a show?"

"Where, Bessie?" I asked her.

"Are you sure you two want me to go?" Her words were spoken lightly but there was a wistful look in her eyes.

Nick turned to her. "I wouldn't think of going without you," he said. And that settled it.

"Then," said Bessie gayly, "let's drive to the place you know of." I had held my breath for her answer. I couldn't have kept my thoughts on a show.

"Bessie," I said, shaking her a bit. "Do you really want to, or because I do?

"You know, honey, how I love to ride, and," turning to Nick, "I imagine it is a wonderful drive."

"It is," he smiled, "let's start now. I'd like to have dinner just about sunset, on the porch."

What a wonderful drive that was. It had been hot in the city but there had been a wonderful breeze over these country roads. Nick buttoned up my coat because he thought it a bit cool, and wrapped his scarf around my head when I insisted on taking off my hat. And we talked—talked of everything under the sun. I had been used to people who talked seriously of everything. He did not treat me as a child then. Sometimes we disagreed and we argued fiercely. But we agreed on one thing, that love was life's greatest gift—and we had not even mentioned it.

And then we came to hills. I asked Nick to tell the chauffeur to coast down them. And then we'd fly with only the sound of the wind in our ears. Finally we came to the highest hill I had ever seen. "Nick, Nick," I cried, clutching his arm, "it climbs right up into Heaven." I looked up at him expecting some laughing rejoinder. But he wasn't even smiling. There was a glorious light in his eyes, and a little quiver around his mouth. He bent down and laid his cheek against mine. "Yes—Heaven—at last," he said in a low

husky voice. I closed my eyes, and a lump came into my throat. Instantly I sensed that some time someone had hurt him dreadfully. I wanted to put arms around him and hold tight, and kill the someone who had hurt him.

The car stopped and we were there. What a lovely place, long, low, rambling—with verandas that literally *hung* over a silent lake. And trees, trees everywhere. I was speechless. "We will order dinner," he said, "and while we are waiting —would you like to go canoeing on the lake?"

"I'd love it, Nick," I told him. "You think of the nicest things to do."

"Does it please you?" he asked humbly. "I am going to spend the rest of my life trying to please you."

What a long time we took ordering dinner. He wanted everything to be just right. And then we started for the lake. There weren't any landings and I turned sick as I looked down. It was a hundred and twenty foot drop from the veranda to the water, so you can imagine how steep the steps were that led down. I had an awful desire to throw myself down those steps. I longed for Nick to carry me. I could have hidden my face in his shoulder and I wouldn't have been afraid. But I walked down them. When I reached the bottom I clung weakly to the rail for support. Nick was alarmed and Bessie told him of my fear of height. "Why didn't you tell me, dear?" he said. "I could have carried you." But I knew by the light in his eyes that he was glad I had fought it out myself.

The exercise made us as hungry as wolves. The dinner that evening was the most delicious I had ever tasted. And in the midst of it we had a tempest—as if I needed anything else to make it all more perfect. I love thunderstorms. The wild power of them, the weird half-light they carry with them, touches some chord deep in me and sets it to humming and vibrating, till I think I shall burst. Bessie was frankly afraid and went inside, but we stood there, hand in hand.

The wind whipped my dress around me and bent the trees almost double. There was a wild, unearthly light all around us. The thunder echoed back and forth, till we thought our eardrums would burst. Nick drew me close to him, and even in the tight tense grip of his arms there was something exquisitely tender. He bent me close to him and whispered sweet passionate words—that I heard in spite of the roar and crash of the storm. His voice was broken, and I was half sobbing. And then he put his lips against mine. Oh, the clean, hard touch of them. All that turmoil stilled; the world dropped from our feet. Slowly he drew his head away. "I wonder," he said, and his voice was unsteady and breathless, "if I will ever be able to touch you without feeling that I am contaminating something too pure and good for this world." Certainly a wonderful love had come to me!

During the drive home we were very silent; there was something inside me that choked up every time I tried to speak. When we reached home, Nick came up with us. I was terribly tired, and he saw it in my face.

"Go to bed, dearest one," he said. "I want to talk to Bessie." When I put up my face to be kissed, he slowly drew me into his arms. He took my face in his hands and seemed to drink in every bit of it with his eyes. Then he kissed me, a light, sweet fluff of a kiss that lingered a bit over the corners of my mouth. There is one perfect moment in every life, it is said. But surely, I have had more than one.

I knew afterwards what he wanted to talk to Bessie about. He told her of himself, his income, his people. "Later," he said, "I will go to her mother," and he smiled tenderly. "I want to wait awhile. I want her to get used to me. I've only known her twenty-four hours," he laughed boyishly. "Isn't it wonderful, Bessie, isn't it? And do you approve of me?" And Bessie nodded, her poor heart nearly breaking.

And so we went on for two perfect weeks. Sometimes we went out and then Bessie was always with us. When we stayed home, she quietly left us. He told me of his business, its troubles, and I would suggest and advise. I was all woman then and he was very humble. One night he told me of the girl who had hurt him so, and of his mother, who had bitterly fought his father's will, that left him a wonderful old house she wanted. "There were jewels too, jewels with legends, for my wife. You will love them," he said, putting my hand against his cheek. "I wouldn't give her the jewels, they weren't really mine. I offered her the house, but she wanted both." I pulled his dear head tight against me and held him close, while I winked away the tears that flowed into my eyes.

And now comes tragedy. You've known that it was coming. I would have, too, if, for one moment, that breathless ecstasy had left me. Perhaps I wasn't quite sane, then, that beautiful thing coming on top of that hideous one——

We had been to see a show and we didn't talk much coming home. Nick held me tight and seemed to brood over me.

"Suppose," he murmured, "I ever lost you. Would I be strong enough to go on living?"

He left at my door, and I turned to find a haggard white-faced Bessie. Slowly, mechanically, she handed me a telegram. All the heart of me seemed to shrivel up. For a second I was horribly puzzled. Oily black waters closed over my heart. I knew what it was. *Ted was coming.* For the first time in all my life I fainted—and I dreamed of death—a crouching, hideous thing. Slowly I struggled back to consciousness, listlessly I raised myself. I knew what I was going to do, but I wanted Bessie. She was face down on the couch. My feet dragged as I went to her. I sank beside her and put my arm over her shoulder. She flung me off and sprang up wildly.

"Don't touch me," she said hoarsely, beating the cushions with clenched hands. "Wait till I tell you. Ted and I planned for everything you did. He was mad about you—and he promised me money. Lots of it. I studied you, your virtues—they were your weaknesses in our eyes. And then I'd tell Ted. He acted accordingly." Her voice was deadly level now, and so low I could hear it. "That wasn't a detective. The 'manager' was the owner of the hotel, a great friend of Ted's. We—knew—you weren't asleep—that night. We wanted you to realize," she started to tremble, violently, "we wanted you to know. He tried to get you the other way first, but it didn't work. He knew you'd never come into—contact with sin in all your life. He knew how protected you had been. He knew you would be confused, that it would take time to adjust yourself. And then he got you to take your first drink and your second. He never left you alone, do you remember?" She was speaking in a monotone, "never gave you time to think, kept you full of whisky. He knew how it would weaken you—and I helped him. I did my—work well."

"Did you, Bessie," I asked piteously, "did you really do that to me?"

"Yes," her voice was high now and wailing. "I did and do you know how I'm paying?—I love you. You're the only woman that ever loved me. And I've done this to you. I'm old—old enough to be your mother—and you're the only decent thing that has ever come into my life—and I've lost you."

"You haven't," I cried wildly. "Listen, please, Bessie, listen, if the badness had not been in me, I would never have done it. Stop, oh, stop," she was moaning in heart-rending sounds. "I love you too, Bessie, we've both been bad, rotten, but life isn't finished. We'll start over again. Oh, don't please, don't cry so."

Suddenly, she stopped crying and sat up. There was only

In one moment he had torn off the shade and held up the lamp.

a convulsive catch of her breath, now and then. "We are going to tell him—and when he hears my story——"

Quietly we talked it over. It was decided that I go to the other apartment that night and get my things. The next day he would be home and it would never do for me to go there then. Bessie saw me into the taxi. "Hurry back, dear," she said.

When I opened the door of his place, a cloud of dust and dirt greeted me. I put on an old wrapper over my evening dress. Methodically I started to pack. And all the time I was thinking, thinking. Perhaps that is why I didn't hear footsteps in the hall. It was only when I heard the door flung back and a drunken voice that I realized Ted was there. Why, I asked myself, hadn't I opened that telegram? I'd just known what it was, I thought, so I had not bothered. I went into the other room. A man was with him holding him up. Even in that dim light I could see what a disgusting thing he looked.

"I saw him trying to get up the steps," said the man, easing him to a chair, where he sat with a drunken stare in his eyes. "He said you were waiting for him." My heart stopped beating—a sickening crash sounded in my brain. It was Nick! Why didn't I turn away, or go into the other room? I stood there, a pleading look in my eyes. He glanced at me—and then in one movement he had torn off the shade and held up the lamp. I stood there in that blinding white glare. Have you ever watched the love of life drain out of a man's face—have you ever seen a clean soul shrivel into a black, hideous thing? Have you ever seen a heart, torn and bleeding, in a man's eyes? I did, that night, and it left his face a ghastly mask.

Then he bent me back until I thought my spine would break—and he kissed me, a brutal, disgusting kiss that seared my soul, and then he threw me from him. He started toward me. I knew he meant to kill me. But sud-

denly he stopped. The passion died out of his face. But the brute lurked in his eyes. "Pardon—me," and he bowed mockingly. "I'm afraid I have been—rough." I looked at him wearily. Where would it all end?

He drew out a cigarette and lit it. His hand did not even quiver. Reflectively he gazed around the room.

"Why," he said, with lifted eyebrows, "don't you come with me? I can give you much better than all this." His airy gesture took in the room.

I looked at him stupidly. At first I did not understand what he meant. Then I shook my head. Go with him—as that! And I loved him so.

I saw the look on his face as he came toward me. I did not know what was coming. He pulled me up to him and talked close to my face. "You are coming," he said between clenched teeth. "I have worshiped you as something holy—almost too pure for common clay like me to touch. And you're a wanton. A plaything for men—with money." He carried me to the car.

That ride was terrible. He held me so tight that I moaned. "Hurt you, do I?" and he held me tighter. He rained hot, lustful kisses on my face and neck. "Marry you," he'd laugh, "planning a nice little future for yourself, weren't you? And all the time you were going to that other man—after I had left." I cried out at that, but he put his hand over my mouth. "Don't lie, don't lie." And all the time my heart ached for him. Two women before had betrayed him—and now I.

For three days he kept me locked in a room in his home. I couldn't even try to get out. My body was too bruised and sore. All through it—I loved him—and he treated me like a foul thing—once I tried to explain the truth—and the next day there were marks on my throat.

He left me that morning, in a savage black mood. I couldn't move out of bed. The old colored woman, who

kept house for him and loved him, had to feed me. "He's mad," she kept muttering, "stark mad."

It came noon and he had not come. I bit my fingers until the blood came. He went in such a terrible mood. Suppose something had happened to him. The thought nearly drove me crazy.

When at last he did come I cried out as loud as my bruised throat would let me. His step was slow and heavy. His shoulders sagged. He was an old man. With dumb stricken eyes he looked at me. "Bessie is here—she told me—everything." Then he crumbled up on the floor. He didn't cry. You couldn't call it that—just terrible sobs, that seemed to wrench and tear him apart. And every sob was like a knife thrust in my heart. Finally he stopped and dragged himself over to me.

"I can't ask you to forgive me—you couldn't," he dropped on his knees by the bed. "Will you marry me? I don't think it can ever be erased from my memory, but it will help me to know you are well taken care of. I know it is an insult," he whispered, "but it's all I can do. I'll never trouble you. Please believe me."

I weakly put out my hand. But he wouldn't touch it. "Yes," I smiled at him, "I'll marry you. Please call Bessie."

When she came in I covered the bruises at my throat. She looked at me, silently, and the eyes she turned on Nick were flaming wells of hate. She curtly told him to go, and then she bathed me and dressed me. We, Nick and I, were married that afternoon. When the minister left, and the three of us were alone I turned to him: "Please," I asked him, "won't you take me into your arms—and kiss me—the way you used to?"

For a long time he hestitated—and the kiss he then gave me carried me through months of pain.

And so we are home, all three of us, tortured by memories, clinging to brave, lovely mother. I am going to get well,

for her sake. And I'm going to bring back the old light to Nick's eyes and the old smile to his lips. I'm going to make Bessie young again and show her how to be happy. I think we have all suffered enough. Those who sin must suffer. God's laws catch the ignorant as surely as they catch the willful. Thank God for a chance to begin again. Life wouldn't be worth living without it.

V

The Man I Might Have Won

HOW often it is given to a young, inexperienced, impulsive girl to make a decision that will wreck two lives, or crown them with lasting happiness! How much power, for good or evil, may lie in the rosy palms of an immature, unthinking child! If I were to make a picture of the Fates personified, I would paint, not old women relentlessly spinning and severing the strands of life, but young girls, hardly past childhood, gayly and carelessly playing with the destiny of the world.

My parents were sturdy New Englanders, who moved to Colorado when I was about ten years of age. I was taught a very strict code of morals, and I had a stern New England conscience of my own. But I was an only child, petted and spoiled, and, as I grew older, I sometimes sought to gratify my own selfish desires under the plea that what I wished to do was right. Such as the time I gravely insisted to my mother that my conscience wouldn't let me carry a basket of food to Benita Santos, our Mexican washerwoman, who was ill, because it was Sunday! My real reason was an exciting novel smuggled that morning into my room.

"This free and easy western town is spoiling you, Annette," my father sometimes said. But I was a gay and happy child and the new freedom enchanted me. My schooling was rather brief, and in due season I became part of the younger set of Rockvale.

We lived plainly and frugally, as befitted our modest means. But a colony of wealthy eastern people spent their

summers in the hills near Rockvale. Although I had no part in their scheme of things, the little glimpses I had of their luxuries, their imported cars, and their many servants, impressed me profoundly. Theirs was a magic world, it seemed, far removed from ours; a world which could be entered only by people with money. I began to long for luxuries and pleasures hitherto undreamed of.

One of the colony, Ted Theobold, sometimes stopped at the Rockvale post office, in a marvelous imported car—a car far removed from our native brands. Ted was—in my eyes at least—a splendid specimen of young manhood. And once, when we happened to meet at the post office window, the postmistress, with true western democracy, introduced us.

Mr. Theobold, gravely courteous, tried to make me feel at ease; finding that I lived at the very edge of town he insisted on taking me home in that wonderful car. He was courteous in an entirely impersonal way; but there was admiration in his eyes, for I was pretty in a wild flower kind of way. I had overheard Mother complaining that I was too pretty for my own good; my yellow hair *would* curl, she said, and my dresses always looked pert, no matter how plainly she dressed me.

Once of twice after that, Mr. Theobold spoke to me when we happened to meet. Then he went east for the winter, with the other summer folks.

I was eager for his return, for I was sure he admired me. I did not love him—did not even fancy myself in love, as children often do—but I had caught a glimpse of wealth, and the thought came to me—why not marry a rich man? It had been done!

Rockvale was a small town, with a few shops and other places of business. For years there had been but one physician, old Dr. Jamison. But just after Ted Theobold left, Dick Moore, the old doctor's nephew, came to live with his

uncle and to practice medicine. Everybody was interested and excited; for Dr. Dick was young, good-looking, and newly graduated from an eastern medical school. He had dark, laughing eyes, that could be stern and grave on occasion. It was soon clear that he knew his business too; that he could be calm in an emergency, and wonderfully efficient.

Rockvale was at first inclined to be suspicious of the new doctor's well-cut clothes, and what they called his new-fangled ways; but never again after the Collins episode.

The Collins family live in a shack high up in the foothills; and one day Tom Collins, white and shaking, galloped into Rockvale with the news that his baby was dying with diphtheria, and would the doctor come? In no time, Dr. Dick was in the saddle, dashing up the trail at Tom's side. But they found that the little stream before the Collins house had suddenly become a maddened torrent, from a cloudburst. One who has never seen a mountain cañon after a cloudburst can have no idea of the vast flood that can appear like magic, nor of the indescribable violence and power of it.

Tom Collins, with a groan, checked his pony on the bank; but Dr. Dick forced his horse to plunge in, and both were instantly swept from sight. Both reached the opposite bank, however, a mile downstream, and eventually reached the Collins house in time to save the baby's life.

Thereafter Rockvale counted Dr. Dick as one of their own. He was a man.

There was not much sickness around Rockvale, and Dr. Moore had an abundance of time for our small social affairs. He seemed genuinely to enjoy them. I was not much past fifteen when he first came. Before long he and I were pairing off together; at first by chance, perhaps, but soon purposely. Of course I was flattered and delighted with the envy of the older girls. There were picnics, dances, parties

—excursions to all sorts of places. Colorado has such an endless variety of loveliness to offer one.

I forgot all about Ted Theobold, and loved Dr. Dick from the very first. I used to watch his slender, sensitive hands, that could make a wonderful sandwich, catch a trout, or perform the most delicate surgical operation, on which hung a human life. How I adored his hands! And his voice, with a dear huskiness about it, that somehow melted my heart. But we had played about together for two years. And although I was certain he loved me, nothing definite had been said. But I did not worry about the future; I was more than happy in the present. Everybody seemed to recognize the fact that Dick belonged to me, although most of the other girls were crazy about him.

One day a party of us planned to scale a peak of the Sangre de Cristo range; six of us besides my mother, who acted as chaperon.

We spent the night at the foot of the peak, in a little hotel; and next day we climbed to the top. It was a long hard climb, but we were more than repaid by the grandeur of the scene before us. For a long time we gazed, almost in silence. At last, Mamma decided that it was time to descend, and led the way down the steep trail. Dick gently detained me.

"Let's take one last look together, Annette," he whispered; and we turned once more to gaze over the widespread maze of cañon, forest, and plain, above which the late afternoon sun spread a mist of glory. We could hear the rest of our party scrambling down the steep trail. I found Dick's eyes upon me with a look almost of anguish in them.

"Annette," he said in a strange voice, "look at all this beauty, and you'll understand what you are to me. Until I came west I lived down there, like a beetle among clods; I didn't know there were heights of happiness so utterly lovely, and so far above the ordinary world! How can any-

one go down—to the petty living, the dull, drab streets—when he has once seen this! But you see it must be done! How can I go back—to the life I must live, when I've seen you and love you so dearly—so dearly——"

His arms suddenly crushed me to him; his words ended in something like a groan.

A flood of happiness swept over me. I was not timid or shy—I had loved him so long, and trusted him so completely. The look, almost of despair on his face, smote my heart; and I hastened to reassure him. My arms went impulsively around his neck.

"But you don't have to leave *me,* Dick! Don't you know I love you? Surely you know I've always loved you!"

"Oh, darling! Dearest love!"

He kissed me tenderly, reverently; our first kiss.

"I knew you loved me all the time," I whispered, "and I'm happy! Nobody ever was so happy before!"

There came a distant call of "Doc! Annette!" from the rest of our party. It brought us back to the world of reality.

"We must go, Dick; or Mamma will scold."

"Yes. Let's look once more at this beauty—together." Hand in hand we gazed at the breath-taking panorama. Then, after one more kiss, we started down the trail. The steep, stony trail—down from the heights.

From that time on Dick and I were together constantly. My parents approved of our engagement, stipulating only that we must not be married for another year, at least.

For two years Ted Theobold had not been in Rockvale; I had nearly forgotten him. Dick and our love had absorbed me wholly. Then, one day in early summer, as we drove slowly under the pine trees Ted's beautiful car swept by Dick's shabby roadster. I saw a flash of pleased recognition on Ted's face as he passed. There were ladies with him, and a feeling of something like jealous dissatisfaction

stole over me. I pictured myself in Ted's car. Provided with suitable clothes, I knew I would be a beauty.

Dick was poor—would always be poor. Wasn't I making a mistake? Wouldn't it be well to see what else life might offer before I settled down to poverty and obscurity? Then I looked at Dick and my senses returned. After all, it was Dick I loved; not Ted. What was I thinking of?

Now and then, when Dick made calls at the neighboring ranches, I went with him, waiting in the car until he was ready to return. One night in midsummer as we drove home under the friendly stars, Dick, who had seemed constrained and silent, suddenly said:

"There is something I must tell you, darling; something I should have told you long ago."

I looked up at him, startled; he seemed pale and grim in the moonlight, the lines of his mouth set and stern.

"Oh, what is it?" I asked, frightened a little. "Don't you love me any more?"

"Love you! Don't doubt my love, dearest. Never do that!

"Annette, I was engaged to a girl before I ever saw you —am engaged to her yet. I thought I loved her—but I never did! I've been engaged to her for years."

I sat up very straight. "Then what do you mean——"

"I didn't expect to fall in love with you, or anyone, dear. I didn't dream you'd care for me, when there were so many boys your own age. But I was hopelessly in love before I knew it."

"If you promised to marry another girl before you came here, you must marry her, of course."

To many people these days, to whom not even marriage is binding, that statement would seem ridiculous; to me it was a simple statement of fact. To keep one's word, to carry out one's contract, was the only course of conduct possible. At that time no baser thought prompted me.

"No, no, there is a way out. I'll not give you up—I'll die first. I've written—her—and asked her to release me. I've told her plainly that I don't love her—that I love someone else. Of course she'll free me."

"If you are engaged to her, you have no right to ask such a thing."

"Of course, it isn't an easy thing for a man to do! I feel like a cad, a beast. But what else can I do, darling?"

"You can keep your word. Marry her."

"When I love you? When you love me? Never!"

During his first year in college, Dick told me, he had boarded with a widow, Mrs. Maxwell, and her daughter Sara. The next spring Mrs. Maxwell died, leaving Sara utterly alone, except for an invalid aunt in Chicago. Sara was much older than Dick, who, like any boy, had been flattered by the evident liking of an older woman for him. He pitied her loneliness, and mistook his pity for love. He proposed to her and was promptly accepted.

They were not to marry until Dick finished school and became established as a physician. Long before that he had realized the folly of his engagement, but Sara had never wavered in her determination to be his wife.

"After I met you," said poor Dick, wiping the perspiration from his face, "my situation became unbearable. I had resolved to go through with it at any cost. But you showed me the heights; dearest love, I *can't* go back to the dreary levels."

"Where has this woman been since you came to Rockvale, Dick?"

"After Mrs. Maxwell died, Sara went to her aunt, Mrs. Baily, in Chicago. The aunt was at death's door, and she made Sara her heiress on condition that Sara stay with her until her death. This Sara promised to do, for her aunt seemed fatally stricken, and her fortune was considerable. But, thank heaven, she's still alive!"

After awhile I forgave Dick, and let him take me in his arms. I couldn't doubt his love. Of course the woman would release him.

Life went on as before; there were parties and dances, camping trips and picnics, with plenty of wholesome work. Then one day Ted Theobold's magnificent car stopped at our gate; he had brought his sister to call. Lucille Theobold was as charming as her brother; she made me feel at ease, and my austere mother quite fell in love with her almost at once.

"Ted's been telling me of the little beauty he discovered," Miss Theobold said cordially, "and I quite approve his taste."

Wonder of wonders! They invited me to their summer home for the week-end. I went, and was once more overwhelmed by the beauty and luxury of their lives. I was petted by the whole colony; I had my own maid, and once Miss Theobold arranged my hair and dressed me in some wonderful clothes and jewels. I was amazed at my reflection in the mirror, and everyone seemed delighted, especially Ted.

"How lovely you are, dear!" said Miss Theobold kindly. Heaven help me, she meant it as a kindness!

I loved Dick, but there was also room in my heart for vanity, for ambition, for longings after luxuries. Once more I saw Rockvale as a crude little town—Dick as an obscure country doctor. Wasn't I making a mistake? If Sara Maxwell proved stubborn—Ted Theobold admired me—perhaps——

One day I asked Dick if he had heard from the other woman. He swept me into his arms, almost fiercely.

"I heard from Sara long ago; she refuses to release me. I've written her again and again, but she grows more determined all the time.

"Why, I don't know. I've been brutally frank and she

threatens to sue me, to make no end of trouble. But I will never marry anyone but you."

My heart was like lead in my breast; but something—my vanity, I suppose—whispered that perhaps this was a sign that there were better things in store for me. I pushed Dick's arm away.

"Then we must not see each other again; you will have to keep your word to her. Here is your ring, Dick. It never really belonged to me."

I had never before seen tears in Dick's eyes, but they were there as he took the pathetic little ring.

He pleaded, he argued, he besought me by our love, not to desert him; but I was adamant. I really felt that he belonged to the other woman; but my heart held a baser motive, too!

"We can't avoid each other; I won't avoid you, darling," said Dick, tormented beyond endurance. "We'll have to meet—everywhere."

"That won't matter," I replied. "There will be no harm in our being together, only we must both remember that you belong to someone else."

For a time, there was little change in outward life; as Dick had said, we met everywhere. It was happiness just to be together, even with this tragic thing between us. I had one talk with Ted, and it convinced me that he was really falling in love with me. Fall came, then winter. It was nearing the Christmas season.

Then, without warning, her aunt in Chicago died and the Maxwell woman wrote Dick that she was ready for him; that she expected him to come for her at once. She had wasted her youth on him; he must fulfill his part of the contract.

For hours Dick pleaded with me to marry him, to run away with him—anything! He was in a kind of panic.

My heart, so hard then, breaks now to remember the

things he said. But I would not. It was not all avarice. I really felt that he was pledged to her, and should keep his word—at any cost! How many destinies lay in my hands that night, and I not yet eighteen! I felt rather heroic to stand without wavering, in my decision.

At last, worn out by my stubborn refusal, Dick suddenly stood up, pale as death; his eyes desperate.

"All right, Annette; if that is your decision, I'll marry her. God help us both! You never loved me!" And he rushed away.

I went to my mother, and told her the whole story, except Ted's part in it. I was shaken at last and felt the need of Mamma's strength. She listened grimly.

"You did right, Annette," was her only comment. "You couldn't be taking what belongs to someone else."

The next night Dick left for Chicago. Before he took the train, he made one last appeal to me, to marry him, and go with him where the other woman could never hear of us. But I would not; and he went away, through the falling snow. The snow that silently but surely shut Dick from my sight.

Rockvale seemed dreary enough after Dick was gone, but I didn't feel anything. Some part of me seemed dead, or drugged. I went mechanically through the daily round, almost like a sleepwalker.

Christmas Eve the Mortons gave a dance, and the whole community was invited. How strange it seemed not to have Dick to take me! But I must not dream of staying away, or people might say I was mourning for him.

There was an unusually large and brilliant crowd at the Morton's party; also an undercurrent of excitement that I didn't understand. Not that it mattered. But I tried to be interested.

"Has anything happened?" I asked Nora Morton when I got the opportunity.

"Don't you know? You ought to, Annette! The bride and groom will be here!"

"Bride and groom?" I asked stupidly.

Just then there was a stir near the entrance; and I saw them. Beside Dick was a tall, dark, beautifully dressed stranger—his wife! She would always be beside him—my Dick! He would never take me to a party any more.

Oh, I must bear it. I must. I must not faint before all these people!

I began to pray, frantically, but silently. I could not look away; and as if drawn by a magnet, Dick's eyes looked straight into mine—his great, dark eyes, that used to laugh so! What had I done?

Blindly I turned away, regardless of curious eyes upon me. I could not meet her. Without a wrap I slipped out a side door—out in the snow, under the coldly glittering Christmas stars. For a moment I thought Dick might follow me. Oh, no! He belonged to someone else now. He would never seek me any more. What *had* I done?

I did not feel the icy cold, nor the snow about my thin slippers. I felt nothing but that knife in my heart. Stumbling, and wringing my hands, I hurried on aimlessly. If I could only die; if I could only sink down under the soft cold snow, and be seen no more!

After a while I came to my own home, and went in. Father had gone to bed, but my mother still sat sewing. I had never seen her face so moved, so compassionate, as it became then. With a little exclamation of pity she lifted me in her arms—I was small and slight—and held me there, and rocked me as she used to do when I was a baby. My chilled heart melted, and I burst into a storm of tears.

But even then all Mamma could say was:

"You did right, little daughter; you couldn't take what belonged to someone else." But I could not claim even that crumb of comfort.

All night I lay sleepless, staring into the dark. Long before dawn I arose and dressed, silently, not to disturb my parents; I was trying pitifully to fit my shoulders to the burden I must henceforth bear. And that dreary Christmas day wore away to late afternoon, when Mamma came to my room, to tell me, anxiously but hopefully too, that Ted Theobold wanted to see me; that he had come from New York, in the dead of winter, expressly to see me. Wouldn't I put on a prettier frock, and see him?

Once such news would have thrilled me with delight; but now I went composedly in to meet him, not bothering to don the "prettier frock." He came forward, boyishly eager; then his smile vanished.

"Miss Annette! Why, what has happened? Your cheeks are like marble! What has become of the roses?"

"They died last night. It doesn't matter."

He held my hand, and regarded me anxiously. Then he told me, simply and earnestly, why he had come. He loved me; would I marry him, and go back east with him? I refused him, gently but firmly.

"You trust me, don't you? I want your happiness most of all, dear girl! What is troubling you—has changed you so?"

"I do trust you, Mr. Theobold. I have just spoiled my life—and the life of the man I love. I won't spoil yours. Good-by."

Of course the time came when I had to meet Dick and his wife. I tried to accustom myself to think of her there in his house—the house that should have been my home. But it was bitter; no one knows how bitter!

Spring came, and never once had I spoken to Dick alone. But I was always thinking of it, hoping that some day we would meet, just once more. He had held me in his arms, many and many a time; he would never hold me in his arms any more.

But I loved him; ten times more than when he was free. To speak to him once more—surely there could be no harm in that. I was perishing for the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand. But spring had changed to summer, and I had seen Dick only in a crowd.

One day I rode my pony, Silver, far up into the foothills. My eyes were fixed upon the trail, but I was thinking of Dick; I was always thinking of Dick. Before I knew what was happening, Silver took fright, and threw me. One ankle was hurt—not much; but I could not catch my pony. And I was miles from home, on a lonely mountain road.

After an anxious time of waiting, I heard a car coming. I slipped behind a cluster of shrubbery, and waited till it came in sight; for one sometimes encountered rough characters among the hills. But it was Dr. Dick, returning from a visit to a mountain patient.

Dick had thrown himself tirelessly in his practice, answering every call, no matter how remote or inaccessible the place. So it was not strange to have him appear here, on this lonely road. As I stepped into the open, I saw that he was changed; thin, pale, and years older. He looked at me almost wildly, as he stopped the car and sprang out.

"What are you doing here?" he asked harshly.

"Silver threw me; I was just going to walk home."

"You might have been killed! What do you mean, coming up here alone?"

"I wish I were dead! I wish I could die! But you wouldn't care!"

My unjust but anguished words seemed to utter themselves. The next instant we were in each other's arms. Right or wrong, I belonged here. Nothing but the touch of his arms, the sting of his kisses, could ease the intolerable pain I had endured, almost without cessation, since the terrible moment when I had seen the other woman at his side.

I sobbed out all my anguish and despair, and bitter regret there on his shoulder, with the mournful pines whispering about us. I had not an atom of pride left. And his dear arms held me, tenderly.

Why, why had I been such a fool as to give him up? After a while he talked a little—brokenly, despairingly—what was there to say? As the shadows began to deepen in the cañons, we climbed into the car, and reluctantly went down—down to reality; each to take up the heavy cross of our own making.

That summer Donald Barry came to Rockvale from Dayton. He had a mine up in the hills, and he came West, partly as a lark, to develop it. Soon men were at work on the mine, but Donald himself spent little time there. He hunted, fished, and enjoyed himself immensely at our crude western parties. Donald singled me out for especial attention, and in my desperate efforts to forget Dick, I flirted outrageously with Donald. But before long I found out Donald was in earnest; and I dismissed him abruptly. It seemed that I brought trouble always, not only on myself, but upon all about me. Then I resumed my hopeless musing about Dick; my lost love.

One October evening, when my heartache seemed too sharp for endurance, I stole out, by way of the garden, to walk a while under the stars. I walked fast along the deserted road, trying to forget my pain. Suddenly a car passed me and stopped; and I heard Dick softly speaking my name. Right or wrong, his voice had power to move me more than anything else in the world. He spoke softly through the dusk:

"Get in, Annette; I saw you come out, and followed you. I'm going to Thompsons', out in the country. Come with me! Please come!"

"Oh, I couldn't, Dick—darling! What would people say?"

"Nobody will know. You know I wouldn't harm you, my dearest! You *are* my dearest, in spite of everything. And I must talk to you—just once more, darling! You don't know what I've suffered!"

It was weak, it was wrong, of course; but I went. Dick held me in his arms as of old, and murmured a thousand tender, heartbroken words of love. My face was wet with his tears.

"It was all my fault, dear Dick," I sobbed. "I was vain, sordid—I thought I could marry for money, and not love! Oh, Dick, my suffering was deserved, but yours wasn't! Can you forgive me, dear Dick?"

"Hush, love! There can be no question of forgiveness between us two!"

It was happiness just to be near him, and the road to Thompsons' was all too short. I sat in the car while he made his call; and no one was the wiser. We were almost silent coming back; and at the shadowed corner of our garden he helped me out of the automobile.

"How it has lightened my burdens to have you with me like this!" he whispered. "You will go again, won't you? If I can see you now and then, I can live.

"Do you know, Annette, I had resolved, if you refused to go with me to-night, to shoot myself? I had made that decision.

"Look here!" He showed me a gleaming revolver. "I had borne all I could, Annette."

"Oh, Dick!" I whispered in horror, clinging to him. "Never do that! Promise me, before I go in, that you'll never do that!"

He gave me the promise, and we parted happier than we ever thought to be again. I went quietly in to find my mother waiting for me, and looking more stern and grim than I had ever seen her.

"Annette, where have you been?" she began.

"Out doors, Mamma," I answered, sinking into a chair. I felt what was coming.

"Who was with you?"

"I was alone," I turned away; I could not face her.

"How dare you lie to me? Is this the kind of child I've raised? You were with Dr. Moore!"

"Yes, I was, Mamma! I went with him to the Thompson ranch, and waited in the car while he made a call there. Nobody saw me. I thought I could live and never see him, but I can't!

"Surely it wasn't so very wrong, just to ride with Dick —I've ridden with him many a time!"

"Not wrong? And he a married man? Haven't you any regard for your good name? For your own self-respect?"

I wrung my hands. "What shall I do, Mamma? Help me! Help me!"

"Pray, my poor little girl. That's all that's left to do."

I did pray, most of that night. And in the morning came what I supposed to be an answer. For, just after breakfast, Donald Barry came in.

"Annette," he said, the moment we were alone, "I can't help thinking you like me a little. You've been hurt terribly—I'm not asking how—but you have. I've just had word that I must leave for Dayton to-night. Won't you marry me to-day, and come with me? I'm not so romantic, maybe, but I love you, and I'll be awfully good to you, honey."

I looked at Donald. He was a fine, clean-looking chap, with fair hair and kind blue eyes. Surely I would be safe with him!

"I don't love you, Donald—I can never love you. In fact, I love—someone else. But I can never marry him—never! I like you—that's all."

"Are you sure you can't marry the other fellow?"

"I am certain. If you want me on those terms, I'll marry you!" I said recklessly.

"I want you on any terms, honey," he said tenderly.

I told my mother after a while, and she said everything possible to dissuade me.

"This is the answer to my prayer, Mamma! This is the one way out."

"No, no, child. Donald's all right, I reckon. Ted Theobold was all right. But you'll rue the day you marry without love!"

But I was determined—a little insane, perhaps; for, when Mamma begged me to wait, to think about it a while, I turned upon her frantically:

"Do you want me to kill myself? I swear to you I will kill myself, or run off with Dick, if you interfere with me now!"

Mother, pale and frightened, ceased to plead.

That evening Donald and I were married, and at dusk we boarded a train for the East. Dick was out of town. I was married and gone before he knew anything about it.

I *was* a little insane! For I remember coming out of a daze, to find myself in a stateroom on a speeding train, without remembering how I came there. Then Donald came in, and put his arm gently about my shouders. As I looked up at him, with a feeling of loathing that the man didn't deserve, full realization came over me. I was married to this man. I had given him the right to be there with me. And my heart was bleeding—slow, aching drops of agony for Dick; for Dick, who was now doubly lost. What had I done! I fell in a deathlike swoon.

Two years passed before I saw Rockvale again. I learned as thousands of hapless women have learned throughout the ages, to be a smiling, attentive wife to one man, while every fiber of my being longed for another. Donald was really good to me; he tried in every way to win my affec-

tion. He never knew who my lost love was, and for some reason believed that my first sweetheart was dead, and that I had sensibly ceased to mourn for him.

My husband soon developed a deadly jealousy of any man who was civil to me; he was even jealous of my parents, and resented the long, affectionate letters they wrote me. But strange to say, it never occurred to him to be in the least jealous of Dick Moore.

When the second spring came, I found that a new responsibility was coming to us. Donald was jubilant, but I was utterly indifferent. To me it was just one more affliction to endure.

All summer, while Donald was planning a rosy future for our baby and shielding me from every possible care, I spent the long hours in apathetic silence, with Dick's face always before me; Dick's dear face, never more beloved than now!

Suddenly I wanted to go home to my mother. I had not asked for anything before this, and Donald, delighted that I should show interest in anything, readily consented.

We reached Rockvale the first of September. My parents made much of me and were overjoyed to have me with them once more. They pretended not to see how changed I was from the fluffy-haired, laughing, little Annette, who had once danced and romped about so gayly.

Rockvale had changed, too; I hardly recognized some of my former friends who dropped in, but I tried to be interested in the trivial affairs which had once seemed so important. I had been at home several days before Dick's name was mentioned. Then Mamma broached the subject casually, as she sewed on a tiny garment.

"He's greatly changed," she said, carefully avoiding looking at me. "He never laughs any more. It used to do a body good to hear him. Sara has developed into a terrible scold, they say, and nags the doctor day and night. He's

not been any too patient with her, either, if all we hear is true. She's showing her age; she's sharp and thin."

I stared at my sober reflection in the wall mirror beside me—the mirror in which I used to see a lovely, laughing child face; and made no answer.

I hardly stirred out of the house, except to walk awhile each day in the garden. But one evening at dusk, I opened the gate at the lower end of it, and walked a little way along the road there.

Here I had climbed out of the car, after that last ride with Dick. Here he had held me in his arms and kissed me as he bade me good night—a good night that proved to be good-by. For the very next day I had married Donald and gone away. What had Dick thought, when he knew? What had he said? Did he remember our kisses?

Musing, I turned to retrace my steps—and found myself face to face with Dick's wife!

She had evidently been taking a short cut to some neighbor's house; she had a little shawl about her shoulders, but her head was bare. Even in the dim light she looked old—old and haggard.

I stammered something—I don't know what—and she bent her brilliant eyes upon me. They were bitter with hate.

"Oh, so you've come back to try again to steal my husband? You didn't have much success the first time, hard as you tried!"

"Mrs. Moore"—it was hard for me to utter that name—"what do you mean?"

She laughed harshly. Her voice rose shrilly, "I'm not such a fool as to be ignorant of your low tricks. Besides, my husband has often laughed about your attempts to capture him. It is quite a joke between us. Charmed to have seen you, I'm sure."

She brushed past me on the narrow path, giving me a

little push as she passed. It was not a hard push, but my strength was gone, somehow, and I felt myself falling. I heard her crisp steps up the path. Then the ground seemed to rise and strike me with great violence. Then all grew dark.

I awoke in my bedroom to an agony of pain, to hear hurrying footsteps and my mother crying. I heard her say:

"Get the old doctor—Dr. Jamison! Be sure to get nobody but him!"

Then came merciful oblivion. There came short intervals of consciousness once or twice during the night. Dr. Jamison, whom I had known since childhood, was bending anxiously over me whenever my eyes opened.

About ten the next day I awoke; for the moment, almost free from pain. A nurse was busy at a little table and there was no one else in the room. But there were people in the next room—I heard Mamma say, in a low shocked tone:

"You haven't brought *him!*"

"Why not?" It was Donald's voice. "He's the best doctor here, everybody says, and I'm not satisfied with Dr. Jamison. The young doc'll be here in a minute."

Then I heard Dick's step—and Dick's voice! The door opened, and over Donald's head I looked straight into Dick's eyes. He was white as death. Donald came to the bedside, seeing I was conscious, and took my hand possessively. Dick's face contracted as with pain, but he said not a word; his eyes burned into mine. Then, again, came oblivion to me.

That night my little boy was born.

"Whatever was the matter with Dr. Moore?" asked the nurse, a week later, when I was beginning to recover. She was a newcomer to Rockvale, unacquainted with its inner life. "He always struck me as a wonderfully efficient physician, but on this case he acted kind of crazy!"

"He saved Annette's life; that's efficiency enough," replied

Donald happily. "Dr. Jamison admitted to me that he had no hope."

If this were fiction, it would have a happy ending, in which Dick and I would be united.

In real life, alas! our mistakes remain mistakes, with all their inexorable consequences. I have known many lives as needlessly wasted as mine.

Perhaps some girl who reads this is, through pique, caprice, avarice, or pride, about to cast aside the priceless gift of a clean and honorable love. Before you sever two lives that were intended to be one, think of me!

After a while, Donald, the baby, and I went back to Dayton. We have never left here since.

Dick continues to practice medicine in Rockvale, incessantly nagged by his jealous, unhappy wife. I spoke to him alone but once, before we left Rockvale. I was coming out of the house one evening a little in advance of Donald, when I met Dick, medicine case in hand, passing our little front gate.

"Annette, dear love! Have you ever been sorry you made me marry—that woman?" His hungry tormented eyes pierce my heart.

"All my life! All my life! But, Dick, my own lost love, you have all of me that is worth keeping," I said hurriedly. Then Donald came out, and with a cordial greeting for the doctor, drew my arm through his. I never saw Dick Moore again.

But I have one comfort—a strange, strange comfort, to ease my longing and regret. My boy looks marvelously like Dick; his dark eyes gaze at me lovingly, with Dick's old laugh in them. How could it be otherwise when Dick's face is always before me, day and night?

VI

My Romantic Madness

HERE is a lure about the stage which intrigues the outsider. There is an intangible mystery about stage people that piques our interest. That is proved by the success of magazines that deal with lives of actors. The rosy colors of the spot light give them a fascinating unreality, and invest their beings with a tantalizing charm. My story is of one who has been behind the scenes; who touched pitch, who found the skeleton beneath the glamour and the grease paint of the stage.

I can scarcely call myself an actress; yet in this story I figure as one. Better call me a "trouper."

From the time I was a small girl, I was clever in impersonation. I "spoke pieces," was featured on local programs —and loved it. I loved the lighted stage, the attentive, applauding audience, the hushed attention that followed my appearance. I fed unhealthily on the praises heaped upon me and waited impatiently for the next chance to appear and display my rare talent.

My mother died when I was ten years old. My father had scarcely means to support me. He was in frail health, and when I was fourteen he was forced to go west as a last resort to try to stop the ravages made by constant hemorrhages. He was a man of unusual brilliancy of mind, very tender of me, and I wept hysterically when he unwound my arms and boarded the train to go.

Perhaps my life would have been different if he had not left me then. I had no mother. The words of the old

song may be banal, but they are sad, "No Mother to Guide Her."

I was a well grown girl at fifteen. I was in high school, doing indifferently well in my studies. Far better than that, I was appearing every little while on the stage as a reader, or in home talent plays. Pictures taken at that time show me a graceful girl with a pair of expressive, long-lashed eyes. I loved to act. An old friend of father's called me "Mary Anderson," and it gratified me immensely.

I shall never forget when The Carelton-Colby Stock Company came to our town. It was to play there for several weeks, and I resolved to wheedle money from Aunt Caroline so that I might go every night. That first night I sat spellbound. The play was "East Lynne," and I lost myself in the story. I suffered with the heartbroken heroine and my tears fell fast in sympathy with her sorrows.

What small things influence our lives! "Trifles light as air," but what havoc they make!

One afternoon I met on the street a boy whose proud privilege it was to shift scenes in the theater.

"Got any flowers down home, Viola?" he asked.

"Plenty," I answered laconically. "Why?"

"'Cause Miss Carelton, she wants some flowers fer tonight. She's gotta have some. If you will fetch her some you can get in fer nothin'."

"Can I take them to her myself?" I cried in rapture.

"Sure!" he said. "Come to the stage door 'bout half-past seven and I'll let you in."

You may be sure I was there with a huge cluster of flowers. Miss Carol Carelton, the leading lady, was in her dressing room and I entered timidly into the lady's presence. She sat half-dressed before a mirror, making up. Two other women shared the tiny, barren room. Three trunks almost filled it, and groups of cheap costumes hung on nails against the walls.

Miss Carelton was carefully lining her eyes with a soft stick of black, elongating the edges of the lids and shading them heavily. Her face was a mask of red and white, with a tiny mouth—much smaller than her own—outlined on her lips.

She accepted the flowers graciously and commented on my appearance in the frankest manner, somewhat to my embarrassment

"Isn't she pretty, girls? Such lovely eyes! You're a regular beauty. What wouldn't I give for your teeth, child! Isn't she the sweetest thing you ever saw, girls?"

A knock sounded and someone called, "Are you decent?" The door opened without ceremony, and a man bounced into the room, borrowed a can of grease paint, and departed.

I gasped. The half-dressed state of the women shocked me, but they went on making up as if nothing had happened.

You may be sure that Miss Carelton found out that I was stage-struck. She learned that I could recite.

"I'd love to hear you. To-morrow is Sunday. Do come to the hotel and speak some of your pieces for us. Do! Promise?"

I don't know to this day whether she expected me to furnish amusement, be a laughing stock, or whether she really was interested. At any rate, I said I'd do it—and I did. It was a chance I had long waited for!

The little hotel parlor was crowded. Almost all of the company was there, and others besides. I hated speaking to this tiny handful. It is so much more difficult to appear before a few than before hundreds. But I went through with it.

I gave a humorous negro story, and they laughed and applauded. I gave a short extract from a then popular book and they liked it. Then I presented a reading just furnished me by my English teacher. Something new—

very lovely, very appealing, reticent, and stately. It was someone's version of the healing of the blind man by Jesus.

When I had finished there was silence. Miss Carelton was weeping. She rose impulsively and threw her arms around me. The tension was broken, and what they said was enough to turn anyone's head.

The Carelton-Colby Stock Company was to be in our town three more weeks. I attended every performance. I laughed at Uncle Josh Whitcomb, I shared "Lady Audley's Secret," I wept to see "Camille" die to soft music, I followed breathlessly the tragedy of "The Silver King," and the love of "Ingomar, the Barbarian." I dreaded to see the time fly so fast.

Before the time was up, I was surprised one evening by a visit to our house by Miss Carelton. It seemed that Barbara Kent, one of the company, had fallen and broken her leg. She had been taking smaller parts and now they were at a loss as to what to do.

"Now, child," said Miss Carelton nervously, "are you quick to learn parts? Oh, I know you must be! We'll stumble through some way to-night without Barb, but we'll simply have to get someone. Will you take her place to-morrow night? Get busy on this part, and try to be letter-perfect in it by to-morrow."

She unfolded the part with its complicated cues.

"Then come to rehearsal to-morrow at ten. We'll all help you and, besides, people know about Barb and will overlook mistakes."

Mistakes! I made up my mind there would be none. Learning the part was easy. I felt so happy and important on my way to the "opera house" the next morning that it seemed as if the whole world must be saying, "She's a real actress now." I thought myself a prodigy!

Even now I remember—shall I ever forget it?—the peculiar smell of the "green room." Stale tobacco, grease paint,

old perfumes, gum wrappers, dust, fusty dyes—unique.

I played small parts for them all that week, and found to my astonishment that I was being paid for it! Paid for an adventure, a lark, an office of pure joy! And finally it was settled that I was to go with them. Mr. Colby, leading man and joint owner of the show, simply talked Aunt Caroline into it. My pleas and tears added weight and it was settled. How my schoolgirl chums envied me!

"You owe it all to me, Fly-away," Martin Colby told me, and in the shadowy green room he put his arms around me and drew me close. I thought little of such an action since I had seen the easy manners of these players toward each other. Unceremonious entry into dressing rooms, hustling about, half-clad, sitting on one another's beds, the careless touching of persons in a half embrace. At first it startled me but a few days erased the feeling. These troupers were creatures of another world, truly players, and if passion and lust lurked behind the familiar gestures, I had yet to find it out.

"You owe it all to me," his caressing voice was saying.

"I know it, and I do thank you for it. I'd do anything for you, I'm so happy," I sang, as I loosened his arms so I could stretch my own as I skipped in joy—a trick I had which had caused old Frances, the heavy, to call me "Fly-away."

He stood smiling at me. I remember his fine head with its wavy hair brushed back from a high forehead. He had the hero's figure, and it was no wonder girls and women flocked to see him act. There was passion and tenderness in his dark and narrow eyes, and they were fixed on me now with a peculiar look that half frightened, half delighted me.

"I'll remember that," he said softly, and I wondered what he would remember; for in my delight at his victory over Aunt Caroline I had spoken carelessly and at once forgot what I had said.

Now I was "on the road." How I loved the life! It was to bring me heartbreak and sorrow, shame and despair—it was to teach a mere child the sordid secrets of life, yet I still cling to the old memories with regret.

We all love applause. A share came to me. Soon I was given a better line of parts. One of the other women was let go and her parts came to me, while another joined us to whom my smaller parts were given.

And I learned what it meant to be loved. Martin Colby was not only the hero of our many plays; he was my hero, too. When on the stage, our hands met, I tingled with rapture and in my eyes he read too easily the secret of a child's heart.

He never betrayed before others that he loved me. In the dark recesses of the wings he caught me, and the long, quivering kisses he pressed on my lips strangely disturbed me. On the stairs I ran into his arms and with his lips against my hair he murmured, "My wonderful girl!"

Sometimes I caught Miss Carelton staring at me thoughtfully, and she was not always as kind as I had first found her to be. Once I asked Martin if this were so and he laughed uneasily.

"The star is always a little jealous of anyone who seems to have talent. Don't let her get wise to us, darling; just for your sake. I want you to have all the success you deserve."

But after that he was careful; he avoided me or treated me coldly before the others. It troubled me a little.

Sometimes we had a little party after the show. We sat around the huge stove in the green room, cooked wienies and made coffee, or had cheese and crackers. These actors, old and young, "cut up" like happy youngsters. The tamest joke or the weakest sally brought the easy laugh. Each tried to outdo the other in wise cracking. The "Tom" show was always good for a laugh.

One of the men, in an agonized falsetto:

"Courage, me chee-ild, and we shall yet reach the otheh side in safety!"

Bloodhounds (by the entire company in deep bass): "Onk, onk, onk, onk!"

It was all screaming farce to me.

A wooden sawhorse left standing on the floor was the excuse for a bit of comedy. One of the men ran mincingly over, seated himself sideways, and gave an imitation of the lady bareback rider as he bounced lightly up and down on the horse's back. As we applauded, he leaped off, balanced on his toes and, with a simpering smile took his bows, blowing kisses from finger tips in approved circus fashion.

It all seemed so jolly, so frictionless, so happy. We played to good houses. Miss Carelton, with her really pretty face, was a favorite, and both she and Martin had played the circuit for three years.

Miss Carelton, of all the women, roomed alone. So did Martin. I suppose the stars were entitled to a little state. The rest of us were paired. The "heavy" and "the old woman" were married. I roomed with Lucy Wilton.

One night I woke in the darkness, half-conscious of a slight noise. I listened. Nothing was heard and I dropped back on my pillow. But I could not sleep. I turned restlessly. I felt thirsty. I heart the clock strike three. I felt thirstier. I rose, and in the darkness found the water pitcher. I stood there idly, wondering again what had wakened me. I thought I heard a door open. Curious to know who else was up at that hour, I opened my door cautiously. My room was in a short L in the hall, and no one was visible there. I crept out and looked around the corner. A light burned dimly. Martin was just entering his room. I could see his fine head, his straight, slender figure, and was faintly amused at the vivid purple-striped pajamas he wore. I slipped back to my own room, a little

ashamed of my curiosity, and straightway fell asleep with not another thought about what I had seen. I never even thought anything was amiss.

Perhaps it would never have recurred to me again except for certain incidents.

First: Miss Carelton tore her new dress. Not much tragedy in that!

Martin released the fabric from the nail with a jerk. "Why the devil can't you be more careful?" His words shot out angrily. Then he checked himself with an effort. Miss Carelton stood rigid.

"But, Martin," she stammered, "I couldn't help——"

I stared in wonder. It seemed to me that in the strained silence, little glances darted about the company.

"I beg your pardon, Carol," gulped Martin. "Don't be so upset. What's a dress more or less?" The silence of the others melted: everyone began to talk at once.

I asked Mrs. Farren, the heavy's wife, about it. She was evasive.

"Why, he jumped at her as if he were her husband, and a cross one at that," I cried. "What are her clothes to him?"

Mrs. Farren was smiling dryly as she spoke, "They've traveled together for three years, and sometimes I think she's in love with him. What are you laughing about?

"Whom do you think he's in love with?" questioned Mrs. Farren.

"I don't know," I muttered in confusion, but I felt the scarlet creeping over my face.

"What kind of houses do you think they'd draw billed as Mr. and Mrs. Martin Colby?" asked Mrs. Farren. "Do you think all those pretty girls and women who come to the show want to see a married man? Do you think the men want to know that our pretty leading lady is a married woman? Why, it's bad for business, kid!"

"If it wasn't for that, would he marry her? Is he in love with her?" My voice trembled.

Mrs. Farren put her arm around me.

"No," she said, "I don't think he's in love with anybody but himself. Martin thinks a lot of Martin. And listen, Fly-away, better stay away from him. He's bad medicine for little girls."

Next day was Sunday and we were idling in the hotel parlor when Miss Carelton missed her rings.

"Bother!" she said, "I've left them in my room. Now I suppose I'll have to climb those stairs."

"Let me run up," I begged. I wanted to please her for she had been very cool toward me for several days.

"Well—on my dresser. Nice bait for a thief." Her rings were really good.

I sped up the stairs.

The rings were not on the dresser. I looked about. Where did people put valuables? Under one's pillow of course. I flew to her bed. Over went one pillow, disclosing a filmy nightgown, neatly folded. No rings. Over went the other pillow. No rings! But a serpent might as well have lain there. For there in neat folds was a pair of brightly striped purple pajamas!

I found the rings on her washstand and went slowly down the stairs to give them to her. Then in my own room I lay on the bed, and sought miserably to think things over.

Days passed. Life went on, but I seemed in a maze. I was not unhappy. I was confused.

Was I in love with Martin Colby? I thought I was. It made me thrill to be caressed by him—to be flattered—to be lain in wait for in dark corners—to be kissed by quivering kisses. I was faintly disturbed by some quality I seemed to have discovered in him. Yet I clung to him—I responded.

The climax came one Sunday evening. In the hotel par-

lor most of the troupe were playing cards. Small stakes stimulated the interest, and Miss Carelton was winning amid banter and fun. I sat watching, missing my roommate, Lucy Wilton, who had discovered an old school friend in the little town and who was spending the week with her. Martin was in the little office writing letters, and through the open door waved me a silent invitation to join him, which I did.

There was little chance for conversation as there were two men in the office. But I sat contentedly close by Martin as he wrote, repaid by a long look from his dark eyes or the surreptitious pressure of his foot as it touched mine.

He wrote upon a sheet of paper, and pushed it slyly toward me.

"I love you." I read it and crumpled it, smiling my own message back into his eyes.

He wrote away at his letter.

Another sheet of paper.

"Dearest, darling, I love, love, love you."

I could feel his burning eyes on my face as I read the message.

Soon he started another slip toward me. I delighted in this pretty game, and my hot little hand reached for it. But he drew it back. He tore it into bits. His hands were trembling. I tried covertly to stay them.

"Please," I begged, but he tore up the slip.

Silence. He was writing. His face was flushed. His handsome eyes were flashing. I knew I loved him then.

A pause. He was irresolute. Finally, with a gesture of decision he wrote on a slip. I stretched my hand for it with a look of intense love. He rose and left the room.

I unfolded the paper. I seem to see those words yet.

"I love, *love,* LOVE you! If you love me, let me come to see you to-night."

I sat still, staring. I could not move. A feeling of deadly

nausea swept over me. I sat numb and silent. Hours seemed to have passed. Those diabolical words were ever visible before me. Finally, in what was really a very few minutes, I rose and gained my room.

I flung myself on the bed and burst into convulsive sobbing. So that was love! That was what kisses and secret embraces and tender words had meant to Martin Colby. My heart broke. I was very young.

Out of all the haze of thought burning in my brain came the idea that I must go away. I rejected it violently. Leave my work—my happy life—my darling profession—my friends—my lover! That last was too terrible to contemplate. For all my passionate, impulsive heart belonged to Martin Colby. My maiden modesty was repelled, but I still loved the offender. I locked my door and in a frenzy of fear and shame, pushed the heavy washstand against it. Then I lay awake, made wretched at every sound; and not until dawn did I fall into uneasy slumber.

White and listless, I went through the day. I avoided Martin and he apparently wished to avoid me. He was cool in his manner. When, at last, we were thrown together alone, he did not touch me. He only murmured in reproach, "You do not love me, after all. Your love couldn't stand the test."

The age-old complaint of men! I caught frantically at his coat but he released himself and left me.

Then began a system of cool reproach or passionate protestations of love. It was a studied effort to break down my resistance, and the amazing part of it was that I understood it. Blinded to his faults by a child's first unguarded impulse, I yet had brains enough to see that this man's love was not the pure untainted feeling that was my own. I remembered Mrs. Farren's hints. I recalled the night I saw him regaining his room in his purple pajamas. He did not marry Miss Carelton. He did not want to marry me. "Bad

for business!" No, I knew it wasn't that. Martin Colby just wasn't the marrying kind.

Steadily his campaign continued; a secret, insidious thing. I felt myself weakening. In his arms in the dingy box office, I begged him to be kind to me, to love me always.

"And you'll trust me, Fly-away?" he muttered thickly.

I yielded my lips to his and let him kiss away my doubts.

But that night in my own room, alone, I seemed to see my father's stern, loving face.

"What are you about to do, my daughter?" Almost I could hear his voice. Oh, what a conflict 'twixt love and honor came that hour! What despair! What heartbreak! I made the great decision. I resolved to run away. A decision only made at the cost of bitterest tears, deepest grief.

So resolute was I that by midnight, after the performance, I had packed my few belongings and was creeping swiftly through back streets to the little depot.

My only chance to get away was by slow freight, but I caught gratefully at it and entered the smoky caboose. I did not know where to go. I sank into a seat and vainly tried to wipe away my tears. I was leaving all I loved, and even its unworthiness could not lessen my wretchedness.

We bumped along, were shunted on to sidings, and spent time just standing still. I fell into uneasy slumber. The other occupants, a couple of sprawling stockmen and an old woman, were asleep. We stopped. Suddenly the pitchy darkness beside the tracks was illumined by the headlights of an automobile. I looked out. To my horror, in the light of the lamps, I saw Martin Colby. I heard him asking questions—I saw him step toward the caboose. Roused at last from my half-paralyzed state, I caught up my bag, sped past the sprawling sleepers and dashed out of the caboose as he entered at the other end. I jumped from the high step to the graveled roadbed. It gave under my weight and slid with me as I went with a rush—down—down!

Breathless, I lay quiet where I landed, fearing I knew not what. At last the lazy freight pulled out and I was alone. Still I lay quiet, too hopeless, too miserable, to move.

All my heart wanted to cry, "Here I am, Martin, all, all yours! Take me to your heart again. Oh, love me once more!"

But I did not utter a sound. Soon the first streaks of dawn appeared to tell me day was near. I rose and wearily climbed to the tracks. I walked on—came to water where I washed my scratched face and hands and made my hair neat. Then I turned aside to the country road.

I was too wretched to feel hunger, but the instinct to find shelter was strong within me. I saw a distant house set at the end of a long lane. In front was an orchard, with high unkept grass and hives of bees beneath the trees. I climbed the fence, meaning to rest in the shady silence. Suddenly I screamed in terror for a huge collie dashed from among the trees, barking and leaping. I cowered in fear. A man's voice called in command, subduing the dog who thereupon began wagging his tail and made friendly advances to me. The man soon followed.

"Don't be afraid of him," he said in a pleasant voice. He was a well-built chap with the nicest eyes, wide-set in a square, good-looking face. His short yellow hair shone in the morning light like subdued gold.

I knew he expected an explanation. I was hatless, rumpled and certainly woe-begone looking.

"I was wondering if I might get some breakfast at that farmhouse," I faltered.

"I think so," he assured me. "It's my house, and my mother will give you breakfast, no doubt. I was taking a little stroll to hunt an appetite."

He offered to carry my bag, and together we made our way to the house.

John Franklin's mother kindly consented to give me a

meal. Soon we three, and a hired man who worked on the place, were seated at the table. My appearance must have excited curiosity, but the feeling was repressed, and only courtesy prevailed. I felt really ill from fatigue and emotional stress. After breakfast I asked Mrs. Franklin if she would keep me that day and overnight. She hesitated.

"To-morrow," I said, faintly, "I will take the train to friends who are waiting for me. You wonder who and what I am. My name is Viola Hammond. The explanation of my apparent plight holds nothing to my discredit. I cannot explain further. You will have to take me on trust."

Mrs. Franklin looked at me keenly. She had her son's intelligent eyes, and her face, although never beautiful, was full of sanity and character.

"You may stay," she decided abruptly, and I sighed in relief.

I bathed and lay down and slept all the afternoon. Exhausted nature repaired her ravages and at supper I came down clean, well-dressed, and looking far less wan.

I sat that evening on the wide old porch in the sweet evening calm of the country.

John and his mother talked quietly of commonplace things. I said little. Bruised in spirit, I felt like drifting. A rising wind and coming chill sent us in early. I did not sleep soundly; I had slept too well in the afternoon.

My future troubled me. I felt that I could not go back to Aunt Caroline to endure the old life, or bear the questions that would be asked.

Suddenly I heard light footsteps, then a piercing scream and the sound of a body falling, falling! I leaped from my bed and stood trembling in the chill air.

Movement—groans—exclamations. Then came a pounding at my door.

John Franklin's voice, "Come quick! My mother—my mother—has fallen downstairs."

I helped him lift her, and we struggled up the narrow stairs and laid her on her bed. She had risen, impelled by the sudden drop in temperature, to bring an extra covering for my bed. Mistaking the step in the poor light, she had plunged down the stairs.

John roused the hired man and sent him to town for the doctor. Mrs. Franklin was half-conscious, and moaned distressingly. I was shivering in a thin nightgown and ran back to my room to put on a kimono.

Vaguely in my brain was the thought of hot application. We heated water and applied it to wrists, feet, and to one shoulder where the pain seemed most agonizing. When the doctor came he approved our first aid efforts, and assured us that Mrs. Franklin, though severely bruised and shocked was in no danger, unless unlooked-for complications set in.

"But she will be helpless for a while, John," he said, kindly. "Better get some help around here. Seems like you got a pretty good little nurse to start with," he ended, twinkling his kind old eyes at me.

When he had gone, John turned in the gray dawn and his voice was almost tender.

"I'll never forget this night," he murmured. "A good angel must have sent you to us."

Already overwrought, I could not keep back the tears.

"Sit by her," I faltered, "I am going to dress and get you some breakfast." I felt that another kind word would utterly break me down.

So Fate had decided where I was to be. Here in this quiet farmhouse helping care for John's mother. How glad I was to stay. I had no heart to plan for myself. I was content to drift, to let Fate hold the lines.

John Franklin was gaining a promising practice in law. He did not like farming, but his mother loved the little farm where her boy was born and, to please her, John lived with her there, going back and forth to his office.

Before many weeks passed I was so necessary a part of the household that it seemed I had always belonged there. John's mother was feeble, one shoulder and arm stiff, and well-nigh helpless. The active management of the house fell to me.

One day I told Mrs. Franklin and her son my story. Sordid as it was, I told it.

Do you wonder I did not fear to tell it lest I might lose their respect? "Perfect love casteth out fear." I did not fear John's verdict, for I had learned to love. Truly to love him. I know now that what I had felt for Martin Colby was not love, but infatuation. He was fascinating, but insincere—shallow—untrue. John Franklin was every inch a man. Truth and sincerity were part of his every fiber.

When he asked me to share his love, I knew it was forever. His was the unalterable devotion which endures through stress and storm.

The thought sometimes comes to me—what if I had found John too late? What if, in my mad fancy for Martin, I had gone down into the mud and muck of a lawless love? In time I should have been cast aside, a broken plaything. Then when my true love came to me, shame would have cast down my eyes.

Five years later I saw Martin again. Bills announcing the coming of the Carelton-Colby Players were posted. On the street I saw Martin. Miss Carelton was with him. She looked faded and old, but affected a jauntiness in make-up and dress. Martin was heavier, a bit puffy, and dark eyes I once thought beautiful, now had a restless and furtive look.

Not a thrill came to me as I gazed at him. He did not see me. I drove on in my car to meet my husband, and Martin Colby passed out of my life forever.

VII

He Wanted Children

HAKESPEARE said: "There is a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will," but I believe that the man who put the comma after "rough" instead of before it, was not such a fool, after all.

Many years have passed since the events related here occurred, and yet it is with a real feeling of trepidation that I am now, for the first time, setting down these facts which, hitherto, have been locked away in the treasure box of my heart, too sacred for anyone to know.

No one could have guessed my secret; no priest, physician, or lawyer has had my confession, and no friend my confidence, I had thought.

I had thought indeed to carry my story untold into the Great Beyond where, we believe, all things will be made right. Why then, am I writing it? That is a thing which I cannot explain even to myself. Possibly, to relieve an overburdened heart; or it may be just weakness coupled with the long repressed hope that it may carry a message of love to the only one who of all those most vitally concerned in this narrative will have the power to supply the rightful names and places.

It all started the summer I was eighteen and had just been graduated from the fashionable girls' school at Elmcliff.

Mother had been making elaborate plans for bringing me out the following winter. She dearly loved the social whirl and was never so happy as when the season was at its height. In fact, there was just one thing that gave Mother a bigger thrill than a well-filled engagement calendar; that

was to see her name in the paper the day following some big society event as "among those present."

But a few weeks after my graduation, just as we were ready to leave for a month at the seashore, dear old Dad had a sort of nervous breakdown and the doctor prescribed a sea voyage. So we canceled our reservations and Mother and I decided we would accompany Dad. The plan was to go first to England, and then for a cruise through the Mediterranean. How little I dreamed that my whole future was to hinge upon that trip!

We sailed on the fifth of August—a never-to-be-forgotten date—for it marked the day that I first met Bob Williams. There was nothing unusual or romantic about the meeting itself; it was uninterestingly conventional, or conventionally uninteresting, whichever way you choose to put it. But from the first handclasp, time, for me, just naturally ceased to exist, and I lived in a rosy haze not measured by hours, minutes and seconds, but by the coming and going of a certain well set up, gray-clad figure. It was love at first sight with both of us, and before the boat docked at Southampton we were engaged.

Father and Mother were inclined to be a bit unpleasant about it at first, but that was natural, considering that I was their one and only and that they knew next to nothing about Bob. Though how anyone could talk five minutes with him without knowing that he was ab—so—lutely all to the good, was beyond my comprehension. At that time he was an agent for a very old and conservative firm of merchants in London. So Dad lost no time in looking them up, and after a half-hour's conversation with them, all his objections to our engagement were withdrawn. He even won Mother's reluctant and tearful consent. Poor Mother! All her plans and dreams for my coming-out party had to be given up, though the prospect of a big church wedding did much to assuage her grief.

"Well, if it had to be, it couldn't have happened better, Kathy," she said. "Now we can run over to Paris and buy your trousseau."

Which we did.

Dad went on his Mediterranean cruise alone, while Mother and I spent much time and money in the Paris shops, with frequent—very frequent—visits from Bob.

And so the summer passed, and at the end of September we all returned to New York.

Bob and I wanted to be married in November, but Mother was hoping we would wait until spring, for she always hated to do anything in a hurry; and since my wedding was to be the greatest achievement of her social career, she not only wanted time to enjoy it in anticipation, but also to feel sure that nothing should be overlooked that would make for its success.

But Bob had to take another trip to England early in November and we simply couldn't think of being parted so soon. So the date was set for November third, and preparations for the great event went ahead. Oh, the teas and dances and luncheons that were given in our honor! How tired we were of them! But the time was short and all of my friends wanted to meet and entertain my fiancé. So poor Bob and I had no time to see each other alone, and we missed those delightful heart-to-heart talks so vital to the newly engaged.

One night, driving home after a dance, Bob had a happy inspiration. "I tell you what, sweetheart," he said, "let's get up early to-morrow morning and go for a canter in the park. I'll call for you about seven and we can ride for an hour before breakfast. What do you say?"

"Splendid!" I cried. "Why didn't we think of it before? Just think of my having you for a whole hour, dear, all to myself!"

"You little witch," he laughed, kissing me; then, very

tenderly, he added, "Oh, Kathy dearest, if anything should happen to keep us apart, I shouldn't care to live."

The next morning, bright and early, found us in the park. Our mounts, procured from a near-by riding academy, seemed to realize the importance of good behavior on their part, for they walked sedately side by side along the bridle path under the crimson arches of the trees. What a glorious day—and what a short hour! I could scarcely believe it when Bob, looking at his watch, announced that our time was up.

"Let's do it every day," I cried, and as Bob readily acquiesced, each fine morning thereafter found us in the park at seven, where we would ride until eight or eight-thirty, sometimes ending our lark with breakfast at some hotel in the vicinity. And so the days flew by until the wedding was only a week off, and Mother dear put a veto on the early morning stuff.

"You're beginning to look sallow, Kathy," she remarked. "You know you can't burn the candle at both ends. I'd advise you to give up the rides and get a little beauty sleep."

"Just one more, Mother," I pleaded, though I knew she was right, for the days were getting so strenuous that most of the time I felt like a mere rag.

"This is the last time, Bobby," I said sadly as we turned our horses in at the entrance to the park.

"Perhaps the last for Miss Abbot," he laughed, "but just think of all the rides Mrs. Williams and I will have together."

I started to reply, but at that instant the thing occurred which changed my entire life—such a little thing, too—a puff of wind—a pedestrian's hat blow under my horse's nose—a rear—a plunge. Then a moment of terror as I felt myself falling—then—blackness!

Hours afterwards I woke in terrible pain. Strange faces were bending over me. I was dimly conscious of hushed

voices. Where I was, or what had happened I did not know, and was too weak to care. All I wanted was to sleep and forget the horrible agony that racked my poor body.

Weeks passed which I cannot even now recall without a shudder. But I will not torture you nor myself with a recital of my hospital experiences. It is sufficient to say that it was well after Christmas before I was considered strong enough to be taken home. Then it was Daddy's strong arms that carried me down to the carriage where dear, fussy Mother waited with enough pillows and blankets to supply an army of invalids.

It was good to be home again among the dear familiar surroundings after all those tedious weeks. The only fly in the amber of my happiness was that Bob was unable to be present to share in the joy of my home-coming; but he had had to take the long-deferred trip to England. During the weeks when my life hung in the balance, his firm had been most considerate, but when the danger was over and it was just a matter of gaining strength, he felt that he could no longer postpone the trip which was to be a short one. He was due home very soon now, and I was impatient to see him.

"Well, Mother dear," I said one morning when we were sewing together in my cozy sitting room, "you will have your way, after all."

Mother looked puzzled. "What do you mean, Kathy?" she asked.

"Why—the wedding, of course," I responded. "You wanted a spring wedding, and that's what it will have to be —now."

To my surprise I saw her eyes fill with tears.

"My dear little girl," she said, laying down her work and coming over to put her arms around me, "I have not dared to tell you before, you were not strong enough to bear it, but I am afraid that you must give up all thought of mar-

riage. At least, you ought not to consider it without first having a very frank talk with Bob so that he will understand just how things are."

"How things are!" I repeated. "Why, aren't they just the same as they were before my accident?"

"No, dear, not quite," faltered Mother. "You see, you were injured internally when the horse threw you, and an immediate operation was necessary if your life was to be saved. It was a very serious operation—very serious—and now it will be impossible for you ever to have any children."

So that was it! I knew of course, that there had been an operation, but I had been kept in ignorance as to its nature. So the enlightenment came as a considerable shock. Rising unsteadily I walked into my bedroom and closed the door. I wanted to be alone to think things over.

For more than an hour I lay on my bed fighting the thing out. And I always came up against the same blank wall—I *could not* give up Bob—and yet I felt that I must!

I had always been fond of children. My own childhood had been a lonely one, and I had often longed for a brother or sister to share in my play; so it was not strange that, with the thought of marriage had come also the half-shy longing for children of my own.

And yet, they would not be mine alone. Our children! What a splendid father Bob would be! What were his feelings in regard to the matter? I was sure that he felt as I did, for though those reticent days young people never discussed such topics, I could judge by chance remarks and by his great tenderness for the little ones. He could never see a child in trouble without stopping to inquire the cause, and doing all in his power to chase the tears away.

If I were his wife he would look to me for this happiness. Had I the right to marry him, and so forever snatch it from him? And loving him as I did, could I stand aside and see some other woman fill the place which I so gladly would

have filled, but which, through no fault of my own, was denied me? I could not decide the matter. I would leave it to Bob.

As soon as I had reached this determination I got up and went out to where poor Mother was still sadly wondering if she had done wrong in telling me.

"Mother dear," I said, sitting down beside her and taking her hand in mine, "I have decided not to see Bob again until he knows everything. When he comes to-morrow, Father must tell him—or Dr. Gibbs. If he still wants me after hearing what they have to say, why, I shall do everything in my power to make him happy. If he decides otherwise—I shall never blame him. Please tell Daddy to make that very plain. But the decision rests absolutely with him."

All that night and the next morning I was in an agony of suspense. Bob's steamer was due early in the day, and Father had promised to see him at once. So, at the very latest—if things went my way—he ought to be with me by noon. But—would he come? I paced the floor, drummed on the piano, tried to read—anything to divert my mind from the awful doubts which thrust themselves upon me.

At ten o'clock he came! It was too wonderful! Gathering me into his arms he held me close and whispered, "It's only you that I want, Kathy darling. Do you understand? —only *you!*"

And so a month later, very quietly with only Father and Mother as witnesses, we were married.

It would be impossible for me to attempt a description of those first years of our life together. Father's wedding gift to us had been a piece of property out on Long Island, and all our interests were centered in the new home which we were building. We were so happy in just being together that the cloud which had seemed to threaten us at the start was quite dispelled. At any rate we both were much too philosophical not to realize that in this life one must always

take the bitter with the sweet. We never alluded to our disappointment and, after a time, I began to console myself with the thought that perhaps after all Bob didn't care as much as I had feared he might.

But one day, going through some trunks up in the attic, I came across an old photograph album which contained a picture of myself taken at the age of two. I ran gleefully down with it to where Bob sat writing at his desk. Laying it down in front of him I asked, "Do you recognize your wife?"

For many moments he sat staring at the round baby face with its serious eyes and fluff of curls without saying a word.

Then abruptly he threw both arms around my waist as I stood beside him, and buried his face in my dress. "Oh, Kathy!" he cried, and I could feel his shoulders shake.

"What is it, darling?" I asked, alarmed that he should display such emotion over an old photograph. At that he let me go and sat back, a trifle shamefaced; but his mouth was bitter, as he quoted: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen—" and I understood.

It was shortly after this that my dear Father died and Mother came to live with us. Prior to this I had always accompanied Bob on his periodical trips to England. Now, however, I felt that Mother must not be left alone; so that meant a separation for Bob and me—the first since our marriage.

It seemed strange for him to be starting off alone, for we had enjoyed these excursions together so much that we laughingly called them our semi-annual honeymoons.

How vividly I recall our last evening together! Mother had retired soon after dinner, and Bob, stretched at full length in his favorite place on the bearskin rug in front of the fire, begged me to sing to him. Without turning on the lights I went to the piano and started the old song:

"What would you do, love,
If I were going with white sails flowing
The seas beyond?"

But the second verse was too much for me:

"What would you do, love,
If distant tidings thy fond confidings
Should undermine?
Should I abiding
'Neath sultry skies, should think other eyes
Were bright as thine?
Oh, name it not!
Though guilt and shame were on thy name,
I'd still be true.
But that heart of thine
Should another share it, I could not bear it.
What would I do?"

Bob heard the tears in my voice, and coming over to the piano he put his hands on my shoulders tenderly, saying as he did so, "That's too melancholy for to-night, dearest. Let's have something jolly."

So I dried my eyes and we spent the remainder of the evening singing some of the hits from the musical comedy we had both seen a few evenings before.

The next morning, as he was leaving, Bob slipped a small packet into my hand. "Just so you won't forget me," he whispered.

When he had driven away, I took it to my room and opening it, discovered an exquisite gold locket set with diamonds. A tiny spring in one side released the cover. I pressed it, and there—smiling up at me—was his dear face. I placed the precious trinket next to my heart and there it has hung for nearly thirty years.

The month of Bob's absence seemed an eternity to me, but at last he was back and with the good news that he had been made general manager of all the business in the states east of the Mississippi. That meant fewer trips to England, though it would necessitate considerable travel about the country, and the establishing of headquarters in Detroit. "Still, there won't be the whole Atlantic Ocean between us," I remarked happily.

But, ocean or no ocean, the next three years took Bob away from home more than ever, and if it had not been that Mother was in extremely poor health, I should have closed the house and gone to Detroit so as to be near him.

As it was, he got home for a few days only every three weeks, but even then his time was not free, for he spent most of it at the telephone or in conference with business associates. At times I almost resented his promotion, though you may be sure I was proud of the honor conferred on him. But I could not help longing for the good old days when we had been constant companions.

Then came the exposition in a middle western city and that kept Bob away for the entire summer. He had all the responsibility of arranging for the company's exhibit, and that necessitated frequent conferences with the western manager as well as the representatives from Canada.

At the end of the summer he was simply worn out; so instead of spending his vacation at home as had been his custom, he went for a month's hunting up into northern Quebec with Tom Bisby of the Montreal office. Their camp was miles from any railroad, so letters were out of the question, and I often lay awake nights thinking of all the dreadful things that might happen to him so far away from civilization. But the change and outdoor life did him a world of good and he came home hard and brown, and handsomer than ever.

The following summer Mother fell and broke her hip, so

that she was confined to her bed. I had to be with her constantly, for she suffered a great deal and depended more on me than on the nurse for care. So when vacation came again, and Bob asked wistfully "if I would think him a selfish beast if he went hunting again with Tom," I could answer quite honestly, "Not a bit of it, dear."

To tell the truth, it was something of a relief, for had he remained at home I should have been able to give him very little time and that would have been an aggravation to us both.

Isn't it strange how things happen? I sometimes feel that we are all just marionettes. Fate pulls the strings—we respond—it's all a matter of destiny.

In reviewing my life I cannot detect a single instance in which my misfortune was the result of my own misdoing. It is as though everything had been carefully planned beforehand, like a play, and all that life required of me was to walk through the scenes, quite powerless to change the action.

Just a week after Bob's departure dear Mother died. The end came quite suddenly and peacefully, and I was thankful for her sake that it was so; for aside from her intense physical suffering her grief over Father's death had been hard to bear. It was impossible to get word to Bob and I doubt if I should have tried, anyway, for there was nothing he could have done and he needed badly the rest and change.

When all was over I let the servants go, and closed the house for two weeks. I wanted to get away, for I couldn't stand the loneliness and felt that a change would freshen me up so that Bob's return at the end of the month would find me quite my old self. I could not help thinking that now, at last, our life would revert to the old lines once more. Bob and I would be real pals. Why, it would be almost like starting life over again!

But a difficult problem confronted me. Where could I go to get the rest and quiet which my jaded nerves demanded? It must be a place where there would be no social obligations whatsoever; where I could come and go as I chose and be beholden to nobody.

Such a place seemed hard to find until suddenly like a flash came the memory of a beautiful lake in western New York where, as a child, I had spent one of the happiest summers of my life. I recalled with delight the quiet beauty of the place, seeming almost to hear again the lapping of the water upon the pebbly beach. Immediately I decided that of all places in the world Owago Lake was the one for me now.

So one bright morning a few days later found me sitting on the porch of the little Elsmere Hotel overlooking the sparkling waters of Owago Lake. The air was like a tonic; already the charm of the place had me half hypnotized. It was far lovelier than I had remembered it to be. My magazine lay with pages uncut as I watched the children frolicking on the beach and in the water.

And as always on such occasions, my heart yearned for them in all their happiness and innocence and for the little one which might have been.

In fancy I chose one from the laughing group and called him *mine*. He was a sturdy youngster of perhaps three years—chubby and brown and with a mass of golden ringlets which bobbed with every motion of his small body. It amused me to hear the children call him "Bobbin"—it fitted him so well.

Just here my reverie was broken by an old lady from the "rocking-chair brigade" who detached herself from her comrades and charged down upon me. She was a friendly soul whose chief aim apparently was to impart all the gossip of the place while inadvertently finding out all she could about me. I inquired about "my" baby.

"Oh, you mean Bobbin," responded Mrs. Crosby. "Ain't

he cute? That's his mother down there on the dock with the pink parasol. She's nothing but a kid, herself. They come from out west somewhere—been comin' here three years, now. Last year her husband came, too—awful nice man—thinks the world of that boy. Did you say your name was Williams? Now, ain't that funny? They're Williamses, too. Mebbe you're related."

"Possibly," I replied. "My husband's people come from this part of the country though he has no immediate family."

Then the gong for the noon dinner sounded and we all trooped into the dining room. To my delight Bobbin and his mother were my table companions, so we soon became friends, though the mother being extremely shy had little to say, devoting herself almost entirely to her young son. Dinner over, Bobbin slipped his small hand into mine and proposed that I let him show me his five crabs which were in a pail on the dock. "I yike you," he confided as we bent our steps beachward. "You're nice!"

From then on he was my shadow, following me everywhere and, to everyone's amusement calling me "his yady"; while I simply adored him with all the latent mother-love which hitherto had been suppressed.

"Oh, Bobbin," I exclaimed one day when a quaint remark of his had set me laughing, "I wish your mother would give you to me."

He regarded me gravely. "Well," he responded after due deliberation, "I dess my daddy wouldn't let her—'less you take him, too." Then, clapping his hands, he gurgled, "You ask him. He's tomin' to-morrow. Muvver's goin' to take me to town to meet him!"

But Bobbin was doomed to disappointment, for next morning, while in wading a sharp stone cut his foot which made the town trip an impossibility.

"Let me take care of him, Mrs. Williams," I begged when

I found that she hesitated about leaving him. She accepted gratefully, and hand in hand, Bobbin and I watched her train pull away from the little station behind the hotel where we were stopping.

That was a day to remember! For six hours Bobbin was mine! Nap time brought difficulties, however, for he was in a fever of impatience to see his beloved daddy who was not due until supper time. But I held him in my arms out on the cool piazza, and sang some of the songs I had loved as a child until gradually the warm little body relaxed and his eyes closed. Lifting him carefully, I tiptoed down the hall to their room. The key had been left in the lock, so I had no difficulty in entering. As the door swung open, I stood transfixed upon the threshold. There, facing me on the dresser, stood a framed photograph of my husband!

I placed Bobbin gently on the bed and covered him with a quilt. I even kissed his dear dimpled hand.

The next thing I remember I was sitting on my own bed, my locket open in my hand. There it was—the same face—the same picture even. Slowly, very slowly, I tore the beloved face to bits, saying to myself, over and over, "No one must ever know—no one must ever know."

What could I do? He was coming. He must not find me here. Though the prior right was mine, I am thankful that the idea of claiming it never occurred to me. They were so happy—the three of them. Even if I should destroy their earthly paradise, what would there be left for me? And what had I to offer the man I loved that could compare with his precious little son?

In my heart there was no bitterness toward my husband —I understood so well why he had done this thing.

Five o'clock! He would soon be here! I went in and waking Bobbin, I dressed him. He was wild with excitement; his cheeks like roses, every curl on end. With my manicure scissors I snipped off one of the bright ringlets

—then he went whooping off down the hall—and out of my life forever.

Dear little boy!

I heard the train come. I heard Bobbin's ecstatic cry, "Daddy, my daddy!"

I heard my husband's voice with a note in it that was new to me exclaim, "Well, old man, you look good to me!" And I prayed for strength to do the thing that I felt was right.

That is all. Next morning I took the milk train into the city. It left so early that I avoided seeing anyone except the sleepy landlady to whom I explained that I had had bad news and must start for home immediately.

I went to a western city where an old school friend had lived since her marriage, about the time of my own. I felt I must know someone, and Bess was a sweet understanding soul who would never try to force my confidence, or to find out more than I chose to tell her about myself.

My lawyer back home was the only person who knew where I had gone. Just at first he forwarded a lot of letters from Bob, but I burned them all, unopened, and after a while they stopped coming.

I have never gone back East. I broke absolutely with the old life and all its associations. But one thing remains which binds me irrevocably to the past—my treasured locket.

Yes, it still hangs above my heart, just as on the day Bob gave it to me—and it always will. But within that secret place, instead of the face which I still love—did I not sacrifice my life's happiness for him?—there lies a tiny curl of golden hair.

VIII

The Rum Runner's Daughter

AVEN of rest! What thoughts these three small words bring to the mind. To some it means a mansion with palatial grounds; to others a cottage with a white painted fence and little front garden; to others still it is an apartment with three rooms and bath, to some it even means a hall bedroom—in fact it is summed up by the word "Home," home where the heart is, where love reigns.

To me, it is a little log bungalow on a slope overlooking a small stream in Northern Ontario. In my eyes that is the most beautiful place in all the world.

I can just remember—I must have been very young at the time—a large house where a pretty woman and two small children lived. Some days, a large young man would come, and the woman and children ran to meet him and were glad to see him. I was one of those children, my brother Philip the other. My mother was the pretty woman and how her lovely eyes would shine when Daddy, the strong, young man, would come home. He was the captain on a tug and away from home most of the time. How much Mother and he must have loved each other!

Then came a time when we were not allowed to run and play any more, but were told to keep very quiet. Women with white dresses and caps went to and fro in the house, and Daddy looked so sad. He hardly picked us up any more, and when he did he just held us tight and looked away from us. One day he came and took us in to see

Mamma. She was so white and thin. I remember she kissed us both and held us near for a minute, then we were taken away. Not long after Daddy told us there was no Mamma now. Philip and I could barely understand. But we held close to each other and were so lonesome.

Soon after we moved away from that place and came West. We lived in another house and a woman cared for us. Daddy must have got another job, for he hardly ever came home. But oh, we were so glad when he did.

Philip was about two years older than I. Although at times we were lonesome when we saw other children go about with their mothers and talk about them, we learned to depend upon each other. Daddy was the world in our hearts and often we would walk hand in hand down the dock and ask when his tug would come in. However, we came to care for the woman that looked after us and called her Auntie. So the years went by.

At seventeen I was still in high school. Philip had long since taken a job on one of the barges. He was learning to be a derrick man.

I would have had a position, but Philip would not let me stop school. Daddy had said:

"Jean can do as she pleases. If she feels that she wants to take a position, she can do so." And that was Daddy's answer all through my life.

I was a little below the average in height but I was well built with fair hair and blue eyes. My mouth was humorous, but the lips were a little too thick for beauty. I was just average good-looking.

That winter I grew sick and tired of school. The same old thing over and over again! I told Philip in the spring that I was going to get a job and see something of life. I was, but not in just the way I thought!

After Easter I brought home my books, and flatly refused to go back to school. Philip was worried. He

wanted me to have a good education, and volunteered to pay all my expenses if only I would continue my studies.

Dad had just returned from a trapping expedition in the north, and had made pretty good. He said I didn't have to go to school if I didn't want to. I could stay at home for a while; then if I still felt that I wanted to work, to suit myself. And that was that!

I did nothing in particular for the next two months. When navigation opened and the boats began moving, I knew Dad would be going away and I would be alone. How I did wish I had been a boy so that I could go with him. One evening in a talkative mood I was telling Dad just that, when he suddenly turned and said:

"Why, so you can, Jean. You see, I'm taking a different job this summer and instead of a tug I'm running a launch for a company."

"What compnay?" I asked, wondering why Dad wasn't taking his old position on the *Nokomis.*

"Little girls should be seen and not heard," Dad replied much to my wonderment. "This is a private company and I'm to run supplies from Kellar to the Isle for them. There will be only one man aboard most of the time besides myself and you can be useful to me. That is, if you would like a summer on the lake."

"Like it?" I exclaimed. "Why this is just what I've been looking for. Something different." How different I was to find out.

Kellar is a small village on the northern shore of Lake Superior. It is a quiet, pretty little place mostly inhabited by fisher folk. I wondered why the company picked this place to take their supplies from. But I couldn't think why. It is about eleven hours' run from Kellar to the Isle.

Our launch, the *Fleetwing,* was about forty-five feet long, built for speed and to stand the sea. Her average speed was fifteen miles an hour. Lake Superior is noted

for her sudden storms and the *Fleetwing* had ridden through some of the worst of them.

I soon made myself at home aboard her and learned how to run the engine, a four-cylinder Redwing. At first I was just a little bit afraid to start her myself, but I soon overcame that, and it wasn't very long before I could start and take her about alone.

Dad, and a young man about twenty whom we called Curly, and myself were the crew. During the first couple of weeks after arriving at Kellar we just cruised about, and I asked Dad one day if he had any work to do.

"Not yet, Jean, I haven't had any word. Expect some in a few days. This is surely some position, eh?"

I readily agreed to that, because we had done nothing. So I roamed the woods about Kellar, swam and generally put in the days. It was an ideal summer existence.

Dad had engaged a room for me at one of the cottages. He explained:

"Well—er, Jean, we might have to leave suddenly and you might not be around. You're rarely to be found when I want you, anyway. Of course we couldn't wait for you. And don't worry. We'll be back or send word to you."

So again I was puzzled, wondering what this position could be.

One day while roaming through the woods I came on the prettiest little log cabin. It faced a small stream and a path ran down from the cabin to the bank. Tall pines grew about and an attempt at a garden had been made at the back. No curtains were at the windows and I thought, at first, it must be empty.

There seemed to be no one about, so I opened the door and looked in. I saw no one, so I went in and looked around. There were three rooms, kitchen, bedroom and living room, but things were so thrown about you could hardly tell which was which. How I would have liked to

roll up my sleeves and start right in, there and then. I did start at the rolling of the sleeves; then I remembered that I knew nothing about the owner—he might be a hermit or an old witch. No, there was such a heavy scent of tobacco in the air; it couldn't possibly be a woman that lived in the house. So I turned and went out the door. A man was coming up the path. Likely the owner, I thought. I wondered what I could tell him for being in his house.

At a second glance I saw that he was a young man, tall, with broad shoulders. He had blue eyes and a wide mouth. I saw that he must have spent much time outdoors, for he was deeply bronzed by the sun. At first he was so surprised at seeing me at his door he could hardly speak, he just stood and stared dazedly at me; but in a moment he had recovered himself and smiled, saying:

"Well, well, young lady, and what are you doing in my house, may I ask?"

What could I say? I really hadn't any excuse, for I had just walked in. So I answered:

"Oh, nothing! I was just exploring and came across your house. Thinking it nice, I thought I would like to see the inside of it also. But I only looked. I didn't touch anything. But oh, how I would have liked to move everything right outside and start in."

"So, you would have!" And he threw back his head and laughed such a boisterous, hearty laugh that I found myself laughing with him, as his merriment seemed so genuine.

That made us feel better. He told me he would forgive me for poaching if I would come again some time. He told me his name was Jack Richie—he was looking after a pulp-wood camp during the summer months.

The camp was about two hours' walk from the cabin, but he did not mind, as he liked the cabin best, and could easily go into Kellar when he became lonesome. In the

winter he was a fireman on the railroad, but did not stand for that work in the summer. He was twenty-six. He told me so much about himself that afternoon I thought he mustn't have seen anyone for months. At last he said:

"Goodness! I don't know why I have told you all this. I never have told anyone before. Now what is your name and where do you live? All about you?"

"Oh, no," I replied, "My name is Jean Darce, but you shall know nothing else."

We had a long chat seated near the stream. The time flew so quickly it was almost dusk when I arose saying I must go. He got up also and held out his hand.

"Now we are going to be friends, aren't we? Please say so, and call me Jack. When can I see you again?"

I put my hand in his, and said, "Day after to-morrow here, at the same time. I'm so glad to have met you, Jack, and you can call me Jean."

Laughing, I ran down the path and away. I ran all the way back. What a nice smile he had! And he told me to call him Jack.

Jack, Jack, Jack! My heart seemed to beat time to the name as my feet skipped along. When I came to the dock the *Fleetwing* had gone. Well, Dad had said he couldn't wait when word came. Downhearted, I retraced my steps back up the dock to the cottages, wondering in my heart what this job was anyway, that Dad was so secret about.

Mrs. Jones gave me a note from Dad saying he would likely be back in a couple of days, that he had to hurry away and he was sorry that I wasn't there to go along.

Sorry, my eye, I thought, throwing a pillow viciously at the wall. Then I went over, carefully picked it up and tucked it under my head to dream of the afternoon just gone by.

Two days later I went again to meet Jack. Dad had not yet come back but he had said not to worry, and so

I was light-hearted. We spent such a happy evening together. As Jack walked home with me, we planned to go in a few days fishing in a stream about two miles from Kellar. We were both overjoyed at finding such a congenial companion, and were both glad at our ripening friendship.

The next day Dad returned and when I asked what kept him so long he only replied, "The weather wasn't too good."

But I knew that the weather had been ideal at Kellar, and also that there had been no storm. The same evening Dad left again, but this time I went with him. Curly and he had had an argument with the result that Curly had left that afternoon. He could not secure the services of another young man at such short notice, and so I was forced to go along and stay on the launch while Dad looked after the loading of the supplies.

We left about eight o'clock and ran down the shore about six miles. Here we hove in, close to the bank. Signals were passed from the launch to some lights on the shore, and soon two small punts were seen coming toward us. They drew up alongside and the men begun handing boxes and cases into the launch. I did not go back to the stern where they were loading, but stayed up by the wheel so I did not hear any of the conversation that was carried on in low voices. When the boxes were all loaded on, the boats pushed off and we were soon skipping along at a good rate headed for American waters.

Early the next morning we sighted a small island. We had run all night, taking turns at the wheel. Here we drew into a small cove, and while Dad set the anchor I prepared some breakfast. My, how the water and the fresh air does make one eat! It seemed that I couldn't get enough.

"We'll have to lie here all day and unload to-night," Dad was saying over his coffee.

"What, lie here all day! Why can't we unload to-day and start home to-night?"

"Well, the fact is—" Dad began, then stopped.

"Well—what?" I prompted.

"The boat isn't here," he finished abruptly, and I was left puzzled. In the morning I had a long swim, and in the afternoon I went for a row in the skiff that we always towed. Dad told me not to venture far, so by six o'clock I was back again.

"I hope the sun sets early this evening so we can get started back."

"Why, Dad, what has the sun to do with it?"

"I forgot," Dad replied, "you're always asking questions, aren't you?"

When the moon began to fade about three o'clock in the morning, Dad drew up anchor and we started up the shore. Again there was the flashing of signals, and in a few minutes Dad came and took the wheel, saying:

"You'd better go to your bunk, Jean. Nothing to see here, and I can manage the rest. These men don't always use the best of language."

My bunk was set in a little alcove in the forward part of the boat. It was curtained off by itself, and was quite a pretty little corner. I was very tired and the thought of laying my head among cool pillows was strong, so I said a sleepy good night, and in a very few minutes I was fast asleep.

When I awoke it was bright daylight. I saw that we were lying in the same little cove that we had made the morning before. I was disappointed, for I hoped we would be back in Kellar, as this was the day that Jack and I had planned to go fishing. I knew he would be as sorry as I. Donning my clothes hurriedly I went out into the main cabin.

"Good morning, Dad," I called, and all in the same breath, "what is the big idea of lying in this place all our lives?"

Then I saw that we had a guest. A man that gave the impression that he was very large, although he was of ordinary height. He had heavy, broad shoulders, and black eyes. I noticed the eyes first of all. They looked warm and friendly, but I knew that they could be cruel and hard. His shaggy black eyebrows were heavy above his eyes, and he had dark thick hair. Though he fascinated me, instinctively I felt afraid of him. The warm blood flooded my neck and cheeks, and for no reason at all I felt ashamed. He was smiling now, almost a smirk, and I thought to myself what a strong firm mouth it must have been, but now the lips were loose, and the smile was on one side. Dad came in just then and introduced us. Putting his arm about my shoulders he said:

"Sharkey, this is my daughter, engineer and wheelsman. Jean, this is Sharkey Devore, one of the heads of the company."

The man took my hand and, squeezing it, said in a smooth, suave voice, "I am delighted to know you, Miss Darce, and I'm sure we are going to be the best of friends. Aren't we?

"By the way, Captain, that is a good one—my being one of the heads of the company."

He laughed as if he were well pleased, but Dad silenced him with a frown and a wink toward my side of the room. I'm sure Dad did not mean me to see that play of wits. As soon as we breakfasted we set out for home. We did not reach Kellar until early that evening.

Sharkey could not seem to keep his arms or hands off me all day, and I tried to stay near Dad. I was afraid of Sharkey, and though I hated to show him that I was, I'm sure I did not seem very brave.

When we reached Kellar he whispered in my ear, "You're such a cold beauty, aren't you? You really need someone to wake you up, don't you?" And he gave vent to a hard

laugh, evidently thinking it all such a good joke. "Come, take a short stroll with me up to the village."

"Yes, go, Jean," urged Dad, who had just come up to us. "The air will do you good."

I hated to go, but I thought perhaps a little walk would ease some of the heartache, for I had thought of Jack all day and wondered what he would think of me for not keeping our appointment.

I hadn't left a note for him, either, for I did not think we would be away so long. Now I could not get him out of my thoughts, nor how he would be disappointed. Walking up the village with Sharkey, answering his questions with my thoughts far away, I suddenly came face to face with Jack.

"Oh, Jack," I cried, unmindful of Sharkey's presence or that of Jack's companion. "I'm so sorry I could not come to-day. I had to go away."

"So I see," replied Jack coldly, "however, if you will pardon me for saying it, you seem well cared for." And with that, he walked on.

I fell back and Sharkey took my arm. "Young upstart!" he growled. "Who is he?" But my thoughts were too full to answer him.

Surely Jack did not mean anything. Surely he was only sorry I couldn't come. But I knew in my heart that he wanted to hurt me because he had seen me walking with Sharkey. We soon went back to the launch and I slept aboard that night. I was so hurt I could hardly get to sleep. But the next day broke fine and clear, and I took new hope. I decided to go and ask Jack why he had been cruel and tell him everything.

Asking Dad if he would need me before nightfall, he said no, and I started off for Jack's early that afternoon.

When I reached there the cabin was empty, so I knew that Jack must be at the camp and would not be back till

near supper time. So I tied the tie from my middy about my hair and started to clean out the place. I worked nearly all the afternoon, washed the floors, cleaned out the cupboards, and generally gave it a good overhauling. About four-thirty I had finished. What a difference! It looked cool and inviting now, and so comfortable.

Down at the stream, I washed my face and hands and tidied my hair. Then I went back to the cabin to see what I could find for supper. First I made a custard and set it out to cool. Then I peeled some potatoes, sliced some bacon and put them on to cook. As I turned from the stove I heard Jack coming up the path.

I went out to meet him. Strolling along with his head bent, he did not at first see me. Then, as I called his name, he lifted his head suddenly and smiled so gladly, but only for a moment. Then the smile faded and he was silent. No word of welcome or sign that he was glad to see me. I felt sorry that I had come. But I tried to shake off the feeling as I took hold of his arm, and smiling up into his face, I said, "Come, Jack, see how I have cleaned up the house for you and I have started supper too. After you have had a wash, we will eat, if you think you can eat my cooking. Won't that be jolly?"

Jack looked around at all I had done. Then taking my hands in his he said, "Jean, you are a wonderful girl to do all this for me. I am very thankful." For a minute I thought he was going to say more, but he turned and went down to the creek. When he came back supper was ready, and we sat down. During the meal we talked along the most trivial lines; nevertheless, I was happy and glad that I had come. As soon as I had finished the dishes I went out to where Jack was sitting, smoking his pipe. Sitting down near him I said:

"Jack, will you tell me now why you spoke so to me last evening? I will tell you why I couldn't come to meet you.

I wanted to, but Curly had left, so I had to go with Dad to look after the launch and we could not get back. And I did not want to go walking with Sharkey. Then we met you."

"Oh, Jean," replied Jack, getting up and turning his face away from me. "I liked you so much. I thought that, at last, I had found my ideal girl. Then when you didn't meet me as you promised, I felt that you didn't care. When I went into Kellar I didn't believe that the folks said. However, when I met you with Sharkey Devore, I couldn't help but believe."

"Believe—believe what, Jack? I haven't done any wrong. What are you talking about?" I didn't understand what he meant and I thought I could explain away anything that he might say.

"But, Jean, your knowing Sharkey Devore so well—your father—your launch making those trips. Surely you know who they are, and that is why you wouldn't tell me that first day."

My mind was in a whirl. I caught hold of Jack's sleeve and turned him about to face me, saying, "Truly, Jack, I do not know what you are talking about. I know nothing. And Sharkey—I do not know anything about him. I just met him that day. He was on the launch when I got up that morning. That is all."

Jack was looking at me as if he could not believe what I had said, "You are telling me the truth, Jean?"

"Of course I am! But please tell me what you mean, what are the folks saying? Please, Jack!"

"I cannot, Jean, since you do not know. I thought you were connected with it."

"With what?" I cried.

"With illegal business," was the astounding reply.

Illegal? Illegal? What could he mean? Then it came to me—getting supplies, delivering them in American

waters, Dad's vague responses to my questioning—everything, in fact, led up to this. Illegal!

"Not rum running?" I gasped, turning to Jack, hoping against hope that he would reply in the negative.

But Jack had turned his back and began to walk down the path. My thoughts were all in a jumble; I could not dissect them.

Rum running, that illegal business that I had read so much about! How could my father be so connected with it?

A rum runner's daughter! That's what I was. Oh, how could he! Then I remembered Sharkey. What had he to do with it?

I was sitting on the step with my head in my arms still trying to gather my thoughts together when Jack came up, saying:

"I am indeed sorry for all this, Jean; doubly sorry that I was the one to tell you. Shall I see you home now?"

I rose and walked silently by his side. I thought so much of Jack. He was so good. No wonder he had turned from me when he had found out just who I was. He thought I should have told him myself. But I didn't know.

Just once we spoke on the way, and that was when I asked him who Sharkey Devore was. He replied that he was the leader of the rum running gang, a notorious character that had spent two years in jail for bootlegging. But the men were all afraid of him and obeyed him, fearing for their lives.

Arrived at the house, for I could not bear the thought of spending the night on the launch, we stood at the gate each waiting for the other to say good-by. For I would not want to go on seeing Jack now.

Suddenly I was crushed in his arms, and felt his lips on mine. "I love you so, Jean," he was whispering hoarsely. "I meant to tell you before, but now I mean it more. I

shall always love you. You are so good and brave."

Tearing myself from him, I ran into the house and up to my room. For hours I tossed and turned, trying to find peace for my fevered brain.

First, I remembered that Dad was engaged in this business; that Sharkey was the acknowledged leader, and that Jack loved me, no matter what!

Oh, blessed thought! How it comforted me. He loved me. I could think of nothing else. It made me so happy, yet so sad.

The next day I did not go near the launch, nor did I see Dad. Someone told me, though, that the launch had gone out the night before. Again? Why, they hadn't expected to go, for Dad had said he wouldn't need me. I wondered who went with him in my stead.

Two days later he came to see me at Mrs. Jones'.

"Well, Jean," he greeted me, "I hope you are rested up from your last trip. We had to make another, but Devore went along, so it was all right. Sorry I left no note; hadn't time. We are to go again to-morrow night. Will you be ready?"

"Do I have to go, Dad?" I asked.

Then he looked at me and knew that I knew. "No," he replied, "if you do not care to go, I will try and get someone else to run the engine. It was only that I could depend upon you."

"But, Dad," I pleaded, "why do you go on with this? You must know that it is illegal, and that there is a very heavy fine. Besides, your honor must mean something. Just to know that you are doing wrong."

"No, Jean, you cannot coax me. This means big money, and it comes easy. Think it over. If you will come to-morrow let me know this afternoon." And he was gone.

I couldn't believe my ears! To be dismissed like this. Dad had always seemed so tender and kind. But I had

once read somewhere that being engaged in shady business and having shady friends molds one's character like theirs. It must be true, for Dad was becoming callous.

That afternoon I went down to the launch and found Dad poring over some papers. He put them aside when I came in, and asked what I had decided. I told him I would go if he could get no one else, but that I would rather not. Then I pleaded with him to stop before Devore and his friends had ruined his reputation and honor. I told him how much better it was to be engaged in some legitimate business that perhaps didn't pay as big money, but in which his conscience would be clear.

Dad listened to all I had to say and then, sitting back in his chair he said, "Does it matter, then, so very much what I do, Jean?"

I could not bear that. I started to cry. I told him all about Jack; how I loved him, but I could not go on seeing him now; about Philip who was working so hard that some day he would be captain of the barge, and lastly I went to him, putting my arms about his neck and laying my head against his, I murmured, "And Dad, if Mother were living, she would not like you to do this, nor would you want to."

The moment after I said it, I was sorry because such a spasm of pain crossed his face that I felt my heart wrench.

Drawing me to him he said, "Jean, you win! We quit this forever. But we must carry to-morrow's cargo, for I have already signed the papers."

I was satisfied. I had won my point, and I was happy.

The next day at noon when the daily train came in, two provincial police stepped off. I knew their uniforms the minute I saw them and my heart leaped up almost into my mouth. I wondered what they were there for.

After lunch I went down to the dock. The *Fleetwing* was riding at anchor a short distance out. I sat down on

a barrel swinging my legs, thinking to wait till Dad brought in the skiff. I knew he was cleaning the engine that morning. In a short while two men sat down on a box, not far from me, and began chatting. This is what I heard:

"Yes, that is her lying out there. A pretty launch—what?"

I knew they were talking about the *Fleetwing,* so I started to whistle so that they would not be suspicious. They would not think a girl would have anything to do with it.

"Yes," replied the other, "when did you say she took on the cargo?"

"This afternoon, but they will be careful. I think the best time for us to go aboard is about eight-thirty this evening. They are due to leave at nine, so at that time they will be unsuspecting."

"Yes, that will be the best time," agreed the other and with that they got up to go away. As they passed me, I thought my heart would burst; but they went on, one even turning to smile at me.

What could I do? I was sure neither my father nor Devore ever contemplated the police. Even then, the *Fleetwing* was under way to get her illicit cargo, and I did not know when she would come back. I knew that Sharkey was in Kellar, but I did not know where he stayed, and I did not feel like asking anyone.

Just then, however, a lad of about ten came along the dock and I offered him fifty cents if he would tell me where Mr. Devore lived. Pocketing the fifty-cent piece, he pointed out a shanty on the hill about half a mile from the dock.

As fast as I could I hurried up to it, but it was locked and there was no one about. I could do nothing. I went back three times in the afternoon, but each time I saw no one. At last about seven, without supper—I was too worried to eat any—I went again. The *Fleetwing* had not yet re-

Devore saw my intention and stood in front of me.

turned, but I knew Dad would come back for me.

This time Devore met me at the door himself. He smiled, saying in his smooth voice, "So the iceberg had decided to melt! I am pleased to welcome you. Is this visit in my honor alone?"

I stepped into the room telling him as I did so, all about the police and all that I had heard. He laughed loudly, and I knew then he had been drinking.

"So some one of the meek band has peeped, eh? Well, we shall soon find out who it is, then they shall peep no more." And he laughed again thinking it very funny.

I tried to edge past him to get to the door, but he saw my intention and stood in front of me. He then came forward and put his large arms about me. I tried to cry out, but he held me too tightly. I squirmed and fought, but to no avail. It was like trying to fight a mountain.

I was trying to think of some plan to foil him when there came a loud knock on the door. He thrust me from him into an adjoining room, locking the door as he went out.

Then he let in the visitors and they were soon conversing in low tones. I knew he had not done with me, and this was my chance to escape.

At first I sat on the bed, trying to collect my thoughts. Then in a flash I was up again looking for a place to get out. There was one small, high window in the room. If I could get up to it I would be able to squeeze through it. With all my might I pushed the washstand, the only other piece of furniture in the room beside the bed, until it was directly under the window. Then I crawled up on it, somehow got myself through the opening and dropped to the ground—about ten feet. I hurt my knee in falling, but I could not stop to think of it at the time. In only a few minutes I was running toward the dock.

I knew it must be nearly eight o'clock, and they had said they were going aboard at eight-thirty. I felt I must hurry.

Arrived at the dock after my long run I saw that the *Fleetwing* was back in her place.

I untied a skiff, I did not know whose, and started rowing to the launch with all my might.

I looked back and saw the two policemen come walking down the dock; when they saw me heading toward the launch they broke into a run. I did put all my strength into my rowing then. In a few minutes I was alongside, and when the side of the skiff brushed the *Fleetwing,* I leaped. There was no one aboard. Grasping hold of the anchor chain, I tugged until the anchor came up. Then with my last ounce of strength, it seemed, I pulled the anchor in. After that I hurried in and gave the wheel a flip. No response! What could I do? There was no time to lose. I gave her a little oil, then another flip. It started. Thank goodness, I was on my way!

I turned the wheel and headed for the open water. I looked back; the boat with the policemen was more than halfway from the dock to where the *Fleetwing* had been anchored. I was glad they had not caught me. That thought sobered me instantly. I could not stand to be arrested; the shame and the notoriety would kill me, I'm sure. And Dad? He must have been on his way up to Devore's at the time I was making my get-away. But I couldn't have done anything else. I had no choice. My duty lay in protecting my father. Surely he could hide out until I had safely delivered the cargo. Then they could do nothing.

All that night I steered in the same direction we had taken that former trip. I shall never forget that night. It stands out as the one night in my life when every known emotion passed through my body.

Standing at the wheel of a thirty-five foot motor boat on the broad expanse of Lake Superior all of one summer night, I have never known fear as I knew it that night. For

a boy it wouldn't have been so hard, but for a girl only eighteen, it was something to think about. But I kept on. Somehow the hours went by, and at last the dawn came. About five, I sighted the cove where we had lain before. There was a small boat there before me and I was afraid to venture near, for fear they may have been enemies. Yet I knew the police had no way of communicating with anyone.

A small boat with one man in it set out for the *Fleetwing*. When it came nearer, I grasped the revolver that Dad always kept on board and waited. When the man came closer and saw me he shouted, "Say, kid, put that thing away. I'm here to help you. Where's the old man and Devore? I thought there must be something wrong when the ship didn't arrive on time!" So saying, he climbed on board and made the small boat fast to the stern of the *Fleetwing*.

I soon told him what had happened. He thought me a heroine and said the best thing we could do would be to deliver the cargo immediately, for fear the police had followed. So we turned the *Fleetwing* about, and went over to the cove where the other smaller launch was lying. Here he gave the skiff he had used into the keeping of two men and told them to follow us. We sailed down the lake for almost an hour, then drew in close to the shore. Here two punts were waiting and, at a whistle from the man at my side, some men appeared and pushed them into the water. Evidently they had been waiting for us. As the boats came near I plucked up enough courage to ask the man about the price.

"That's right, girlie, you've got the right idea. Deliver the goods and you'll get your pay, eh? Well, I'm satisfied. As soon as those cases are in those punts, I'll give you your check."

I watched the cases being transferred with a fast beating

heart. For I realized these men would stop at nothing and I was at their mercy. If they refused to pay me I could do nothing. But after the man had told them what I had done, they thought me "O. K." as they expressed it, and made all sorts of jokes about me and my bravery. I merely smiled and went back into the cabin. When the cases were all off, the same man came in and wrote out a check and handed it to me. I looked at it. Surely he had made a mistake. He must have seen the astonishment on my face, for he said:

"Yes, that stuff is outside the law but it pays big. Are you satisfied?"

"Oh, yes," I replied hurriedly. "This must be all right." I could find no further words, for the check was certified and called for eighteen hundred dollars. So much money for such a few cases of illicit whisky. I could scarcely believe it!

"Good-by, Sister," called the man getting off the boat. "Hope we see you again next time." But there wasn't going to be a next time. I turned the *Fleetwing* back for home. I felt relieved now that the cargo was gone. Even if the police did come they would find no whisky. So when I came again to the little cove I turned the launch in and set anchor. I was so tired I could go no further.

I slept until late in the afternoon. After a light lunch I drew in the anchor and headed for Kellar. There was a slight breeze, but I did not mind now, because there was nothing to worry me. I made the run in record time, arriving about three in the morning because the wind had kept me back some. Instead of anchoring her out in the harbor I ran her into the dock, made her fast and lay down for a few hours' rest. Dad woke me about seven.

He and Devore had lain low and escaped the police. To do this they had to leave Kellar, but the police had grown tired of waiting and had gone to the city on the train the

evening before. Dad could not thank me enough for all I had done. Devore had left for the gang's rendezvous down the lake the day before. I was glad I had missed him. I did not want to meet him ever again.

True to his word, that was the last trip we ever made. Two days later Dad and I left for the city. I had no chance of seeing Jack before I left, but I sent him a note telling him everything.

We were glad to be home again, and Philip was glad to see us. He had been promoted, and was now getting a larger salary. He confided to me he was saving to get married and that he wanted me to meet *Her*. She was so beautiful, so wonderful, so grand, etc., etc. Then when I came back at him with my secret about *Him*—that I wanted my big brother to meet Him—he was so true, so handsome, etc., etc. There was a great deal of laughing and talking, and planning. It was so good to be together again. And Dad got his old job on the *Nokomis*. We were all contented.

Two weeks went by, then Jack sent word that he was coming to see me. A beautiful bunch of roses came up first in the afternoon; then Jack came in the evening.

We were overjoyed to see each other. Now that all my troubles were past I was so glad to have him come and claim me as his own. In his arms I found peace and solace, and his lips on mine promised love and tenderness forever.

We were married and are spending our honeymoon in our log "Haven of Rest." Now, white curtains blow at the windows; rag rugs cover the floor; vegetables grow in the garden. The table has a white cover and everything looks homey. In the fall we will go to the city to live, but each summer I hope we will come back here to the most beautiful place in all the world.

IX

If My Son Ever Learns the Truth

DURING the time that the finger of righteous indignation, the glance of offended virtue, was directed toward me, I wondered how many of those who saw in me a loose, unprincipled woman would have believed that the root of my unconventional actions had been planted in the guileless soul of a child of six.

Even now, when my position is assured by my strict adherence to the most rigid moral code, I live in dread of the hour when my past will poke from its long hiding place its ugly head, and I must explain to unsympathetic ears that never was there any evil in my heart, that all my mistakes came from fear, a fear that haunted me from babyhood. How many would credit my story? How many have known similar surroundings in their early life and, not being as hyper-sensitive as I, gone on untainted by fear of the normal ways of living?

The earliest and most vivid memories of my childhood are the unpleasant ones of tossing and turning on the cot in my hot, narrow corner, while, from across the room, came the petulant, shrill voice of my mother and the answers of my father in the rough, discordant tones of a man in anger. Although I had, before I was six years old, learned to fall asleep to such invariable preludes, still, upon the rising of their raucous voices I would shudder and tremble, drenched with the bewildered, helpless despair of a child. I would pull my pillow over my tiny head, trying to muffle

out their ugly words. Once I had ventured across the room and, putting my chin on a level with the mattress, said in a small, frightened voice, "Good night . . ." hoping to distract them from their argument. But my mother, her face distorted with the fury of her last retort to my father, reached out and giving me a little slap, told me to get back into my bed and go to sleep immediately.

I am sure it never entered the heads of either of them that so young a child was storing in a small, perplexed brain all the venom of their quarrels. They were very young and hot-headed and at that time things had been going rather sadly with them. My father had lost his job and he was having difficulty in finding another. There were certain subjects that proved the usual starting point for these battles. Comic and pathetic it is to tell that I used to lie on my cot, playing a game with myself in which I tried to imagine which one of the themes would cause them to squabble. My mother accused my father of laziness and lack of affection and he charged her with extravagance and flirting. Naturally, at that age I understood very little of the significance of their stinging accusations, but the evil and unhealthy atmosphere clung about me as I drifted off to sleep, and I would dream terrible things, seeing my parents chasing each other with knives, and, screaming, I would awake in a cold sweat of youthful terror, to lie panting and uneasy. Sometimes to reassure myself I would slip from my cot and tiptoe over to their bed, and always they would be sound asleep in each other's arms, and even to my childish wonder it seemed odd that all their mean language and violent threats should end so peaceably.

As I grew older, I had a room to myself, and went to school, and my father retained his same position for years. I had other things to distract my mind. I began to accept the atmosphere of my home as the normal condition of

every married couple. I imagined that it was quite the natural thing to find one's parents in the throes of a loud, fierce argument, their faces distorted with ugly feelings and their tones burdened with antipathy and resentment. I became so accustomed to these scenes that I could go right on studying my lessons, or eating my meal, utterly undisturbed by their voices, which were raised so loudly that frequently neighbors leaned from their windows. As my mother would say, when sometimes I questioned her about their repeated quarrels, "Oh, honey, all married couples have their little squabbles. It doesn't mean a thing. Why, your father and I simply adore each other. But I don't dare let him have the upper hand. You have to keep a man under your thumb. The harder you are, the more they love you. . . ." And she would smile at me complacently.

Hardly a suggestion was ventured by my father that my mother did not object to or sneer at, disagreeing with those things in which she was, at heart, thoroughly in accord, finally appearing to yield to his wishes with the greatest reluctance. This, she explained to me, as I grew older, flattered a man, made him feel as if he were master. Now I realize that my father's nature was by far the smoother, the more normal of the two, and had he possessed a wife of normal temperament I should never have known such an atmosphere of unhealthy wrangling and continued discord. My mother was very much like those persons who demand that their food be excessively seasoned to such a degree that it burns and stings the palate; otherwise they cannot get any enjoyment from it. A calm, regular existence bored my mother; the brutal, harrowing scenes spiced life for her, gave it a stinging flavor. I have never seen her kiss my father so tenderly as immediately after some absolutely horrible quarrel. And that they were devoted to each other in their own peculiar, almost perverted fashion, I never doubted, for although my mother invariably ac-

cused my father of unfaithfulness, in the heat of a quarrel, I knew she believed him loyal. I have seen them go off to a show, laughing like two children, after two hours of the most hectic brawling.

Once or twice before I was sixteen we were even asked to move out of our house, as the neighbors complained to the owner about the scenes and the stormy sounds that were enacted at all hours. Always my mother was indignant at such "narrowness," as she termed the complaints, and my father would be a little sheepish with embarrassment, but we would pack up and move into another small, moderately comfortable house—a procedure which furnished my mother with splendid opportunities to upbraid my father for his lack of progressiveness in being unable to furnish us with handsomer quarters.

And thus the years passed and my sixteenth birthday lay behind me. I was interested in my school work, and was taking a commercial course, so that when I graduated in another year I might take a position as a stenographer. Up to this time I had developed no interest whatsoever in boys. My unpleasant home life had served to smother the normal romantic musings of a young girl. I was never caught up by those usual daydreams in which some vague, but highly romantic youth would come to woo and wed me. I knew what marriage meant—I had a perfect picture of the condition in my own home. I put no faith in the stories I heard or read of happy marriages. If people appeared congenial and devoted to each other in public, in my thoughts I imagined them much like my own parents, given to constant quarrels, but too tactful to display their differences before strangers.

To me, being "in love and marrying" meant just one thing—the privilege to revile and abuse someone you professed to care most for in the world, to threaten and insult, alternated by moods in which caresses were freely ex-

changed. I had no doubts that my parents' mode of life was quite the common one, and I admitted that it was all right for those who wanted it, but for myself, I had made up my mind not to think of marrying, but to make a success in business.

Upon this matter-of-fact, unromantic perspective came Allen Branwell, as I will call him. He was nineteen and was taking his senior year in the city high school. Although his classes were a year in advance of mine, he shared my course in typewriting and sat beside me during the hour we had our lesson. He was an acknowledged football star, but shy and so studious that he withdrew from all the school's rowdier demonstrations. I liked his sober, earnest manner, and that he did not try to flirt with me when he first came to the class. Already I had begun to be annoyed by the uninvited attentions of most of the boys, and I regretted my mop of golden ringlets, fair skin and big, dark eyes, which caused them to express admiration.

I remember how we began talking about the typewriting exercises, and his grinning declaration that his hands were better fitted to handle a plow than the tiny keys. In that hour that we sat beside each other, every day, he whispered to me most of his young history; how he had come from his grandfather's farm, far inland, to take advantage of our school facilities, and how he was working at night to pay his living expenses. He wanted to go to college to study to be a lawyer.

After a while he used to walk as far as my porch with me, when our classes were over, and we would discuss with youthful seriousness his future as a great lawyer and my own plans to make a success in the business world.

My mother was greatly interested in young Branwell, as she had felt it unnatural that I had not begun to have "beaus," telling me how she was engaged to a neighbor's

son when she was fourteen. To my chagrin she would tease me about my "catch." I did not think of Allen as other than a sane, good friend, and it irritated me that any other coloring might be put upon our relationship.

As the school year drew to a close, Allen and I used to go to the city library and study for our examinations, enjoying the quiet, peaceful surroundings. I disliked taking him to my home, because my mother was wondering if we were in love, and considered it a very fine prospect, should we decide to marry. I grew angry, explaining to her that we were no more than friends, that I intended finishing high school and that Allen had four years of college ahead of him. She would laugh at me, calling me a "little fool," and said that she lost respect for Allen if he would go to college and study for a high-hat profession when he might marry me and take a practical job. She threatened to talk to him herself, and I dreaded this, for no word of love or of any emotional nature had passed between us, and I feared that she would shatter our friendship.

Immediately after his graduation, Allen went back to his grandfather's farm, as he was an orphan and these were all the relations he had. He wrote me two or three letters, in which he mentioned, casually, that he missed me, and then to my surprise he appeared in town once more. He laughed shyly and confessed that he had grown lonesome for me. To my own amazement, this made me very happy, and I began to take a new pleasure in being with him. Now we took long walks into the surrounding country, and I learned many things about birds and trees and flowers from Allen, who had all the lore of the woods at his finger tips. He secured a job in town, and we used to spend most of the evenings either in long walks or reading at the library. He seemed undecided about the college he should attend, and he wanted to cram the full training in less than four years. We used to pore over catalogues,

balancing the merits of the various schools. He had made up his mind not to accept the many offers that he had received from various colleges to defray all his expenses by means of his athletic abilities. It seemed to him that it was dishonest, and he was planning to work his way through.

To me he was the acme of clean and straightforward young manhood. Beside him every other youth with whom I was acquainted dwindled small and mean. I never heard him utter a word of ugliness against a person; he was fair and open in all his thoughts and actions. People naturally loved and respected him, and for so young a man he had the poise and assurance of one much older. Naturally, I cared for him, but even I was unaware how much he had grown to mean to me.

As the summer vacation drew to a close, he seemed most reluctant to speak of his plans, evading my questions, and finally to my complete astonishment, announced that he had registered in the small, unknown little college that was on the outskirts of the city. I questioned him, remembering that this unpretentious institution had never once entered our many discussions of his plans. And it was upon that evening that, touching my arm shyly, he admitted that he couldn't bear the thought of going so far away that we could not be together. My heart gave a funny leap at this, and before I knew how it happened we were in each other's arms, and his soft, boyish lips were touching my hair and eyes and cheeks. He told me that he loved me, and in my heart I knew that he had become very dear to me; but even as my pulse throbbed and sent the sweetest anguish through my whole body, I knew the sharp pang of fear in my heart.

I pushed him away from my arms and, standing before him, I told him of all the horror I had of what the world called "love and marriage," how I dreaded being betrayed by my emotions and some day marrying a man to live in

the wretched, distasteful intimacy that I saw exhibited daily by my parents. He tried to take me into his arms once more, but I avoided him, drawing away. But he spoke to me gently, telling me how his love for me was tender and loyal, and how he wanted me to say I'd wait until he was through with his college and then we'd marry and have a "different kind of marriage." But I was not to be shaken. I was hard and I told him that we must renounce our fine friendship if he persisted in his entreaties. And we talked a while longer, and finally he gave in, promising to try to kill his love and that we should continue as the same unemotional friends.

And that is the way matters stood, that first year while we were still in school—I in my last year of high school and Allen just starting his college work. We were together over the week-ends, and by touching only upon the most impersonal subjects, blinding myself to the softness in his eyes, denying my own longings, I kept our words, if not our thoughts, far from what we felt in our hearts. That I loved him passionately I had found out to my terror; but if I so much as weakened in my thoughts toward Allen, yearning to yield to him and promise to wait for the future, I had only to spend one evening in my own home to find my heart hardened.

Time had failed to change the ways of my mother and father. Still they caught up the smallest remark as fuel to their fiery tempers. I would sit eating my supper, while across me were flung stinging words, and the table would shake as my father pounded it with his heavy first. Sometimes he would triumphantly exasperate my nagging mother so that she would gulp down her food, whimpering against him, calling upon me to witness the long years of deprivation and ill treatment she had borne at his hands, and, upon my other side, my father would nudge me, pointing to her as the one who had ruined his future by her extrava-

gance and light mind. Sullenly, or more often heedlessly, through long habit, I would go on eating, my eyes upon the book propped before me, which I used as a shield against their violent humors. Always the end was the same. My father, having finished a hearty meal, would get up and stamp out of the room, slamming the door. My mother would sniffle and sob for a few minutes, eating all the while, reminding me of the hardships of her life with my father, and gradually drifting to some other subject—my studies, Allen, or her new dress. Invariably my father would poke his head through the door after a while, and ask for his pipe or paper, and my mother would jump up smiling and, going to him, exclaim, "It's on the mantel, honey. I'll get it. You're tired," and more likely than not he'd kiss her as she went past him.

I graduated from school, and Allen passed his first year of college with flying colors. I found a position with a doctor in town, and Allen, after a visit to the farm, also took a job in town. We were still together every free minute, and the agony of sitting beside him, speaking of cold, practical things, when my whole body longed for his touch, and my eyes evaded the warmth of his own, was becoming unbearable.

I became wan and pale. At night my dreams were disturbed. I thought I had married Allen, and we were quarreling, degrading our love by the vicious, painful scenes that were so common in my home. I wonder if anyone can appreciate the strain I was suffering. Here I was—a pretty, feminine young thing of eighteen, very much in love with a man who was clean, honest, and worthy of my innocence; but leashing my every normal inclination was the shadow of my home life, which I had accepted as the pattern for all marriages.

Allen, too, was not wearing well under the strain, and one night he broke down, his shoulders shaking, his big

man's hands trying to hide the tears he could not control. The hardness melted from my heart and I gathered him into my arms, telling him how much I cared, and how hard it was for me to deny my love. We talked that night for hours, and I made him see, at last, that despite my passion for him, was this other stronger emotion, this dread of marriage that had become so ingrown, so much a part of me as my arms or my hair.

Now began a new period. Admittedly we were sweethearts. No longer could I deny Allen nor my own longings to know his kisses, the delicate touch of his hands, the comfort of his arms. We drifted upon a sea of youthful happiness, and the only cloud was his constant mention of the time when my dread of marriage would die, and we might consummate our love. I would tremble with fright, beg him not to suggest such a prospect, and withdraw from his caresses until he promised not to mention such a possibility.

The school year began again and Allen reëntered the college, taking his courses so that he might finish in less than the usual time. The winter was not so hard, because we were only together upon Sunday afternoons, as he had a job as secretary to one of the professors and it took all of his time. I had changed my position and was earning a splendid salary and the future seemed very bright to me.

When summer came again, my father's health failed him, and we were greatly worried. I was not with Allen much, as I gave most of my free time to my father, helping my mother nurse him. It used to amaze me how, even in his illness, a good, fiery quarrel seemed to freshen up my father and put new strength into my mother. But eventually the doctors said that if my father wanted to live he must spend at least a year in Arizona. And so Allen and I saw them off one morning, and I went to board with a good friend of my mother, as I dared not forfeit my

steady job, which insured a nice check to my parents every month.

How happy were Allen and I! Once more we roamed about the country, after office hours. We used to lie in the high grass and he would tell me the things he had learned in his history courses, or I would read to him from the heavy books he had to study. Sometimes he would crush me to him, frightening me a little with his passion, which I found answered in my own trembling body, and I longed to listen to his eager prayers that we marry. But I was a stubborn young thing and he could not change me.

The next winter my being alone combined with Allen's love and my own growing emotions led to a situation which, considering my peculiar slant on life, might have been seen from the start. We were almost mad with our constant proximity, the deep love we knew was in each heart, and the hard stubbornness of my fears. I used to lie in my bed thinking, thinking, wondering how we should solve our problem. I did not doubt Allen, I did not doubt myself; but I dreaded that the assurance, the monotony of marriage would do to us what it had done to my parents, and that I could not bear.

Came the time when bidding good-by at night was utter pain. After he left me I would toss and turn, unable to sleep, longing for him with every heartbeat, and he told me how he, too, suffered. My work began to be inefficient and he confessed that he was not making the usual remarkable progress that always had characterized his passage through school. We had read together a story in which a man and a woman who believed in trial marriage had lived together until their first child was born and then they had married. At first we discussed the situation of the tale abstractly, then we spoke of our own inability to work out a conventional bond. I was the first who urged upon Allen that we live together without marriage. He was astounded,

would not listen to me; said he would be a cad in his own eyes. But I felt the idea solved our problem. We would be lovers without the narrowing restrictions of marriage, without the feeling of the yoke which, I imagined, was the cause of the unhappiness and hideous results of marriage.

For three weeks I met Allen's every plea that we marry, with my own desire to live with him without the legal tie. I wore down his objections by yielding to my own passion. Where, before, I had restrained my deepest feeling, knowing its exhibition only intensified his suffering, now I gave way to every longing of my heart. And one night he held me tenderly in his arms. Tears were in his eyes, and his voice broke when he said, "My little darling, my little one, you will not marry me now, but I shall be so good to you, so kind, so sweet that after a while you will trust me, and then you will not fear to be mine before the whole world, will you?"

And I, too, felt at that moment, and many times afterwards what I answered him, "Allen, if, at the end of a year, we feel just as we do now and we have been—always, always, every minute—as tender and courteous and generous as has been all that has passed between us, I'll marry you."

And so we began to live together. Our town was just large enough that I might regulate my life to my own designs and not fear immediate detection. We took a little apartment far out on the edge of town, a short distance from the college. I continued my work, as we needed every cent, and despite the expenses of his studies, Allen worked so hard during his free hours that he was able to contribute to our housekeeping. Oh, he was a noble, fine man! No pettiness at all hid within that clean, young heart. We were very happy. It was sweet in the evenings, after our little suppers, to sit close under the same light, Allen plugging away at his books, and I working on the ledgers I had taken as an extra way to make money.

But there was one little rift in our blue sky. Allen was ever teasing me to go into town and marry him. He could not rest for long under the knowledge that the situation was unfair to me, as he explained it. But I would not listen to him, begging that he wait until the year was out. Already I knew that with this man my life would be utterly sweet, absent of all discord, for Allen was big and gentle with me, as if I were but a child. He shielded me from the least exertion, waited upon me as if I were an invalid. It was only my woman's stubbornness that made me stick to my determination that we live together for one year.

My parents wrote that they were located definitely in Arizona and they kept begging me to come. But I gave different excuses, and before we knew it half a year had rolled away. Allen heard of a factory on the other side of town where the salaries were too large for belief, and he went over to secure a job for the summer. His education and poise, the goodness which shone from his face, won him trust and a splendid job for his vacation. We were divinely happy in our little place, now that we did not strain for money.

It was August, and I remember that morning, after Allen left for the factory, I sang as I cleaned and dusted, rejoicing that it was my vacation and that I might prepare his favorite dishes and need not rush to the office. And I thought how good it was to belong to him, and then there shot through me, for the first time, the cold realization that I *did not belong to him* in any eyes, except his and mine.

All morning, as I worked, I planned how I should tell him, and I could imagine the joy that would fill his big, tender eyes and the catch of happiness that would come into his voice. He had never stopped begging me to make our bond legal. I kept thinking of what pride I would take in saying, quite casually to people, "My husband, Allen. . . ."

I took out the dress he loved best on me and I ironed it, deciding that I would wear it as my wedding gown. It was about four in the afternoon and I had just finished putting fresh ribbons on my dress, when there was a ring at the doorbell. I was startled, as we never had callers, and our apartment, as a rule, was deserted all day. A strange man, a policeman, stood outside.

"Are you Mrs. Branwell?"

"Why, yes—what . . ."

"I'm sorry, lady, but there's been a bad accident, and your husband . . . caught . . . machine . . . killed. . . ."

That was all I heard. The next thing I knew I was in my own bed and a doctor was bending over me. I knew they drugged me, because I wanted to sit up and ask them questions, and I seemed to have lost all control over my muscles, and my thoughts would not straighten out. The words of the policeman kept dancing before me, but I told myself that it was just a horrid nightmare, that, in a moment, I'd awaken and my darling Allen would be curled up beside me, sleeping like a good child . . . and to-morrow we would get married. He'd rejoice that all my stubbornness was gone.

But it was not a bad dream. It was bitter, bitter reality. My young lover had been killed. Another worker had been caught in a wheel of the giant machinery and in leaping to save the other man, my gallant Allen was instantly killed. My grief was numbed with pain and the knowledge that I must not betray our secret. I sent for his grandfather, poor, broken old man, and pretended that I had been only a good friend of Allen, and I saw them take away my darling, leaving me alone with my memories.

For days I lay upon my bed, suffering an anguish and despair that was almost unbearable. I was haunted with the knowledge that Allen had died, never knowing that I wanted to marry him, that my foolhardy ideas had denied

him the dearest wish of his heart. Soon came the time for me to go back to the office and resume my old position, and I was glad that there should be duties to keep my distracted thoughts from their suffering.

About six weeks after Allen's death, to my horror, I discovered that I was going to be a mother. I was panic-stricken. Where should I turn? Not to my parents, for my mother wrote that my father was failing rapidly. I had never had many intimate friends, being of a naturally reserved nature, and my life with Allen had secluded me. I was desperate.

I must keep at my work, because I would need every cent. Soon I became so ill that often I fainted while in consultation with my superior. After a while his suspicions were at last aroused, and one day, after he revived me from a swoon, I saw the question in his kindly eyes.

I broke into wild tears, and between my shameful sobs, I told him the whole pathetic little story. Abject, humiliated, I sat before him, awaiting his words of scorn.

"Miss Brown, from no one else could I accept such a story as the truth, but you have been with me for two years, and your veracity and high-minded manner has won my respect. It hurts me that you have wilfully placed yourself in such a sad position, but I cannot rebuke you. Your suffering has already been sufficient punishment. I have heard of young Branwell, the very finest things. I do not doubt that you were both very noble in your intentions, but two idealistic young people cannot disregard the laws of society and escape unscathed. However, I will not lecture you, but if you feel you can and want to continue with me here until your condition becomes too apparent, you may do so. Then I shall defray your expenses in a small, private sanitarium up in the mountains, and afterwards we'll see what can be done for you in some city away from here."

Such goodness surely will not go unrecorded by the an-

gels. My employer treated me with the same courtesy as always and I continued with him another three months, then I went up to the little mountain hospital, where my son was born.

But, as such things will, my whole, sad story had leaked out. Scandalous, ugly versions were told of what had been clean and all-beautiful between Allen and myself. Some woman wrote my parents her own particular filthy conception of the incident. And soon after the birth of my baby, I had a bitter, heartbroken letter from my mother, informing me that my father had grieved to death, ill as he was, over my sin, and that she never cared to see me again.

True to his word, my former employer arranged for me to go to New York and I took my baby, from which I refused to be separated. I posed as a young widow; and, through the influence of my kind friend, I secured a position with one of the largest firms in the city.

All of this happened long ago. To-day I am an executive with my firm. I have repaid my good friend all he expended, but never can I repay his broad, godly sympathy, his tolerance and trust. Only God can do that. Here, no one guesses my past, and so sternly in the path of rectitude have gone my feet that few would credit such a story.

My whole life is my beautiful son Allen, who is a replica of his father. And when I think of him I know the pangs of dread, for surely, some day my child will learn of my secret. The truth always finds its way home. How will he judge me? Will he understand that I was but a well-meaning little fool, and that looseness did not direct my ways? Will he hate me for denying him a father's name? I know that some day will come a reckoning and I am sad, remembering the past.

X

She Taught Me the Meaning of Love

THIS is the story of a man who was, as most men are, prone to judge too harshly; who knew not the value of real love until it was almost—but not quite—too late, and who thought that one misstep—by a woman, of course, and any woman, under any circumstances—put her beyond the pale, so to speak, unfit to marry or be the mother of any man's children.

I am not sure yet just why I write this, unless it is that I hope to warn others not to make the mistake I made; others who are prone to judge too harshly and too hastily, and who may be denied the opportunity I had, to make a second decision. And too, I suppose, I want to let all who care to read know of the wonderful happiness which has come to me since I discovered, and rectified as far as it was in my power to do so, my great mistake; and saved my own happiness as well.

I was twenty-four years of age when I first met the girl who, I thought, was all the things I wanted the girl I married, to be. For four years I had been working as a journeyman sign painter and was making what was at that time considered good money—for a workingman. Being single and unattached and of a rather thrifty nature I had been able to lay by quite a tidy little sum in spite of the fact that I boasted my own classy—at that time—little car, and, if I do say it myself, always looked like a million dollars, as far as clothes and general appearances were concerned.

In fact, many people who did not know me intimately, were under the impression that I was well-to-do, and as I was deliberately trying to create this impression, naturally I did nothing to disillusion anyone.

Doris Kane was one of these, I know now, although when I first met her, it was the fact that I thought she knew the actual circumstances, knew that I had to work for a living and was not financially independent, and was interested in me only for myself, which made me think I loved her.

Another thing which drew me to her was her cool, statuesque beauty—beauty which I was sure, must be untarnished even by a thought. You see, I was one of these men, and there are great numbers of us, I am sure, who, although not angels ourselves, morally or any other way, expect the women we marry to come to us absolutely pure and spotless. I was determined that the girl I married must be the purest of the pure. I felt sure Doris was all of these and that she would make me a wonderful wife. It turned out that I was only half right. Her character, morally, was above reproach, but ah, how much more there is to love and marriage besides moral character!

So Doris and I were married and I, at least, was very happy—for a few days. Now I may have been a little old-fashioned; I don't know. But the fact remains that I was unreasonable enough to expect to find my wife at home once in a while, and also to expect her to look after her house and cook a meal now and then. Well, Doris was evidently of an entirely different frame of mind about that.

I had had my fling, such as it was, while I was single; now that I was married I just wanted to settle down in a cozy little home, have a couple of kids perhaps, and enjoy the simple married life.

I had taken my savings, paid as much as I could down on a little bungalow, and filled it with what I thought was very nice furniture. I thought I had fixed up a very envi-

able little love nest for my Doris and me. When we moved into it I noticed she did not seem to be much impressed, but thought nothing of it at the time. I knew that, although her father was not what might be called rich, they had always lived in style; they kept a couple of servants and neither she nor her mother had ever done a day's work, house or any other kind.

However, I was vain enough to think Doris would be proud of our home because it was ours and, even if it wasn't just exactly what she had always been accustomed to, would take pride in trying to make a real home. How blind I must have been!

Doris could not cook, and would not try to learn. Neither could she, nor would she try to learn to keep house.

I found out that she thought when she married me that we would have servants to do these things.

I found that she drank and smoked. Of course, most of the ladies do both nowadays, but I was just old-fashioned enough to dislike it—especially as she had led me to think, prior to our wedding, that she did neither.

She was always on the go; I went with her until I saw she had no idea of ever settling down. Home to her was just a place to go when there was no place else to go. She flatly refused to have children, and I began slowly to realize that her sole object in marrying at all was so that she could run around and do as she pleased.

She did not love me, and it was evident that any other man would have done just as well, so long as he had money and allowed her to have her way.

I finally refused to accompany her except at reasonable intervals. So she went alone, or with some other man. I didn't know and didn't take the trouble to find out. Her actions had by this time ceased to interest me in the least.

Well, this sort of thing could not go on for long. We would never be happy together, so why go on wasting our

lives? I tried to get her to divorce me, or let me divorce her, but she couldn't see it either way. Although the home I gave her was not all she had expected, still it was a place to come to when she had no place else to go.

I tried to reason with her, but I might as well have tried to reason with a brick wall. Finally, in disgust, I just walked away and left everything. I went to another city without telling her where I was going or what I was going to do. I was through with women—at least I would never marry another—and homes. Doris was welcome to anything she could get on our furniture, or anything else we had owned.

I obtained a job at my trade in this far distant city and worked half-heartedly. I began to take in some of the night life; to drink, a little now and then at first, but more and more as I became more used to the stuff. I frankly admit that I often took on more than I could conveniently carry.

Things went on uneventfully until I met Rose Dunham.

Now Rose was not the first girl I had looked at since leaving my wife. Oh, no! I had met several; taking them as they came—and for just what I thought they were worth —a little respect for some; a little contempt for others, but with no really deep feeling for any of them. But Rose was the first one to cause me to stop and think.

At first she was just a girl to me, to be played with and thrown aside. But gradually, as I became better acquainted with her, I became conscious of a profound respect for her. I didn't know then what it was that made me respect her, but I do now, as will you, I hope, when I have finished telling this story.

At first, Rose was a complete puzzle to me. Or, perhaps it would be better to say she was a great surprise to me. I mean in this way: Her actions and speech were so different from what one would expect them to be. She was

pretty, of medium stature, but exquisitely proportioned; with good features, big innocent dark eyes and a mass of dark brown hair. There were moments when in spite of her physical strength, her eyes took on a soft, helpless look and an ordinary man would want to take her in his arms and love and protect her. But then, when she spoke, or in fact did most anything, the average man would conclude that she was entirely capable of taking care of herself.

Of course, I had no way of knowing that all these indications of self-sufficiency were only on the surface, and forced; so, naturally, I, too, thought she needed no protector.

She was not, it seemed, especially interested in any one man. She would be seen first with one, then with another; but rarely more than once or twice with the same one.

Without exception, they all agreed that Rose was a good pal, sociable, gay and all, but, well—there was something about her which, to use slang, cramped their style. She did not allow them the liberties they were accustomed to taking with other girls, and consequently few of them asked her out a second or third time.

So it was I found myself asking Rose to go places with me. Once or twice wasn't enough for me, though. I found, to my entire satisfaction, that everything the other fellows had said of her was true. But, instead of making me want to drop her, this indefinable something made me want to see more of her. Rose never refused any of my invitations, and before long we were keeping what is known as "steady company."

Although I had not asked it of her, I was pleased to note that Rose no longer went about with anyone else. As we became better acquainted I could not help noticing the fact that a great change was coming over her. She began to refuse cigarettes and liquor when I offered them, saying she did not care for either, although I knew she had been

"I have a baby," she said after a long pause. I stared at her, unable to speak. "You have beeen married then?" I asked

both drinking and smoking moderately when I first met her. There were other changes, too. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, she began to cast off her protective armor of self-sufficiency and sophistication and reveal herself as she really was, an entirely feminine woman who needed and wanted to be protected.

Unconsciously, almost, I began again to dream of marriage, a home, kids. But another and greater surprise was in store for me.

It was on a warm evening in late July. We had agreed that it was too warm to dance or go to a show. The cool, green park had looked inviting and we had found a bench in a secluded spot. My arm lay caressingly across Rose's shoulders. At last Rose spoke:

"Frank," she said, "I can see the way things are drifting, and before we drift too far there is something I must tell you. I love you, there's no use trying to deny it, and I think you are learning to love me. Perhaps I am conceited, and am taking too much for granted; if I am, and you don't love me then it won't be necessary for me to tell you this, as in that case it would not concern you. Do you want to hear it?"

She had drawn a little away from me as she spoke. Her voice was so low as to be almost inaudible, although she had poured the words out hurriedly, as if anxious to have them said and done with.

"I want to hear anything you want to tell me, honey," I said, and waited expectantly.

"I have a baby," she said, after a long pause.

I stared at her a long time, unable to speak. Then, "You've been married then?" I asked.

"No." Her answer was flat, noncommital.

I was stunned! It was hard to believe that this innocent appearing girl, who had held us all at arm's length could have——

"Tell me about it," I said.

Slowly, haltingly, as if each word caused her exquisite torture, Rose told me how she happened to be the mother of a year-old baby girl, and still had never been married. For a long time after she had finished I sat staring straight ahead, thinking. It was a pretty stiff blow.

"You say he would have married you if he had lived?" I asked at last.

"He had said he would; I had expected and hoped he would," she stated.

Just the bare fact, that was all. She did not plead extenuating circumstances, or try to excuse her act because of her youth.

I thought then that it was just plain brazenness, but I was to find out in the days that were to follow things about Rose which would convince me that she was as different from what I thought she was as day is from night.

I found out that she was an orphan; had been brought up in an orphanage until she was old enough to work, at which time she had been permitted to leave and take a position in an office which had paid her little more than just enough to exist upon.

I found that, even then, she had wanted a little home of her own to care for; a loving husband to look after and mother, and cook dainty dishes for, and perhaps a baby or two.

She had thought she loved this man, I can see that now, and had really expected to be married to him—and probably would have, had he lived.

I say I can see these things now, but I couldn't then. No, all I knew then was that she was soiled and, being lily-white myself, of course I could not marry her.

But possess her? Ah, that would be different. I seemed to get the impression that Rose had wronged me in some way, and found myself planning to get even with her. I

thought at that moment that I hated her and that I would enjoy hurting her. What I had thought was love before was now nothing but desire. Hate and desire! A peculiar combination, eh? So, making good use of all my persuasive powers to convince Rose I loved her still, and working upon her love for me, I convinced her finally that it would not be wrong for us to live together for the short time it would be before we could be married. I had told her I was married, but that my wife was divorcing me, and the final decree would be granted in a few weeks. Doris was not divorcing me, and probably had no intention of ever doing so; but that did not matter. I had no definite plan as to how I was going to get even with Rose, but I thought an opportunity to hurt her would eventually present itself.

I secured a small, rather run-down flat and some nondescript furniture to go into it, and we moved in. I was not going to give Rose anything nice, you see, because she was not good enough; and also because I did not intend to stay there long. I know now that she is too good for me or any other man I have ever known, and too good for anything I can ever hope to be able to give her.

Rose seemed not to notice the shabbiness of the furniture or the house, and seemed tickled to death with them. I worked every day and paid little or no attention to anything about the house. Still I couldn't help but notice the great change that was taking place right before my eyes. She must have worked like a Trojan during the time I was away at work, to accomplish what she did. I can't tell you just what she did do really, but each day when I came home the place seemed more homelike, more cheerful; clean as a pin always. I didn't allow her much money to run the house on, but what she could do with the little I did give her—oh, boy! And the delicious dishes she could cook! She took great delight in setting before me a new dish

at every opportunity, each more delicious than the last. Rose was just a natural-born little home maker and manager.

She reminded me of a child in a playhouse; she was so happy and tried so hard to make the shabby little old place look like a home. Poor kid, it was the nearest thing to a home she had ever had and that, I suppose, was why she could appreciate it. Had she but known what was in my heart!

Things went on this way for some time. I still had in mind my revenge, and it began to seem that just to make Rose love me as much as she was capable of, to let her think her home was permanent, and then shatter it all with a word, would be revenge enough. And yet it seemed natural enough for me to come home in the evening, take Rose in my arms and kiss her, enjoy the excellent supper which was always waiting for me; and then spend the rest of the evening just lounging about the house.

One evening Rose asked me when we were going to be married.

"Don't be silly," I said. "You know I never intended to marry you!"

She didn't say any more, didn't plead or rant, but the look in her eyes I shall never forget. It was not venomous, nor angry; and it did not flash into her eyes quickly. It was a hurt, incredulous look which seemed to just sort of dawn there slowly as she gazed at me. It was as if someone other than myself had hurt her terribly, and she looked to me for sympathy and solace. I must have been a blind beast to go on after that; but go on I did.

Of course, I expected Rose to lose all interest in her home and in me after that, and I expected any day to come home and find her gone.

But no! If anything, she worked harder to make things look nice and seemed to try even harder to please me. I be-

gan to have a tough time of it between trying not to love her and my desire to love her and be good to her.

One afternoon about a week after this I came home a little earlier than usual, and caught Rose sewing on some baby clothes, crooning a little lullaby as she worked. As I came in the song died upon her lips and she tried to conceal the nature of the little garments; but seeing it was too late, she shrugged her pretty shoulders and went on sewing as if she didn't mind.

"Who are those things for?" I demanded, although I knew, or thought I knew, that they were for her baby. I had never seen it, but I had told Rose that as soon as we were married, we would take the little girl from the home where she had been born, and still was, and bring her up as ours, mine and Rose's. She need never know she was not my child.

"They are for your baby," she said quietly.

"My baby!" I sneered. "Do you think I meant that about claiming your baby as mine?" But I saw something in her eyes which told me what she really meant.

"Do you mean that I—that you are——"

"I mean that these little garments are for *your* baby," Rose reiterated, fingering them lovingly.

I had told her that one of the reasons for my leaving Doris was because she would not have children, but I had not thought she would deliberately——

I didn't want this to go on. She wasn't good enough to be the mother of my child.

"I know a doctor who will—" I began; but never finished it, for, although she said not a word, the expression on Rose's face said plainer than any words could have done that it was useless.

"Oh, well," I thought, "let her have it. I won't claim it, or support it." Some excuse for a man, eh?

The time came when Rose was no longer able to look

after the house and take care of me as she had been doing.

I had to hire a girl to help her, and as time went on I began to realize to some extent how I was going to miss Rose when she was gone. I resolved to be good to her and make life as easy as possible for her until the little one came, at least, but afterwards——

I asked Rose one day why she had done it.

"I thought you wanted a little one," she said simply. "And I wanted one too, but then I thought we would be married before it came, but now——"

The day came upon which Rose must again go down into the valley of the shadow. The doctor and a nurse were there. I was like a man in a strange house. I had not the least idea what to do or say. The doctor, who had just come from Rose, told me "my wife" wanted to see me. I went in self-consciously and sat down beside her bed, ill at ease and hardly knowing what to say to her. I wondered if she hadn't called me in just to make me feel ridiculous. But her drawn, pale face appealed to me for comfort, and I knew it was just a desire to have me near her that had prompted her. I could see that she had suffered terribly, but for the moment she seemed to be resting comparatively easily.

"Hello, sweetheart," she greeted me, with a trembly little smile. "I wish you would just sit here and talk to me and hold my hand a little while; you don't mind, do you?"

"Of course I don't mind, honey," I said tenderly. "If you are sure you really want me here. But do you think I ought to be here when—" I hesitated, but she knew what I meant.

"I had hoped you would stay," she said wistfully. "But if——"

Suddenly Rose caught her breath with a half-sob, and her hand clasped mine in a grip so tight that I could not have broken it, even had I wanted to leave her.

The doctor and the nurse hurried to her side. Poor little Rose!

What I saw in that room that day brought me to my senses with a jerk. Rose knew what she was going to suffer, having been through it once, and yet she had been willing, yes, glad, to go through it again for love of me.

For almost a week the doctor would not let me go near Rose, saying she was clinging to life by only a thread and that it was dangerous for her to see anyone, especially me.

In that week I suffered more than I had any idea I ever could; more, I am sure, than I shall during the whole remainder of my life—unless the good God takes Rose from me. I learned to pray for the first time in my life; I prayed to Him to spare my Rose; I prayed to Him to make me—or let me make myself—worthy of such love and such a woman; for I had found that I loved Rose; that she was all the world to me.

I knew if she died, the fault would be entirely mine, and I would not want to live. Oh, how could I have been so blind as to try to make myself think I had never really loved her, and try to ignore such a wonderful love as she had given me?

My prayers, or at least part of them, were answered; for Rose began to improve, and one day the doctor told me I might see her for a little while.

My heart sang as I opened the door and tiptoed in. I was on my knees beside the bed, my arms about Rose and the little one, crying like a baby before she knew I was there.

"Why, honey, why are you crying?" Rose asked, surprised. Her free hand began to stroke my hair. All embarrassment, all sense of being ridiculous, left me as I poured out my heart to her.

"I am so happy, little mother; so happy you are going to get well and I am going to have you always," I told her. "I am happy that this little one, yours and mine, has come

to make me see what a fool and a monster I have been. Oh, sweetheart, can I ever make you as happy as I am?"

I felt her arm tighten about me, but she said no word. Finally, I forced myself to look her in the face. Her eyes were closed as if she might be asleep but, as I gazed, a great big tear crept from under each closed eyelid and rolled down her cheeks.

"What can I do to make you forgive me and love me again?" I pleaded desperately. "What can I do to make you happy, and make up for the way I have treated you?"

"I never stopped loving you, dear, I couldn't," she said, "And if you want to make me happy, just love me, and—" She broke off, as if she were afraid to say the rest of it.

"Yes, sweetheart, we'll be married just as soon as I am free," I assured her earnestly; then added vehemently: "And I *will* be free from her!"

It was almost as if a kind fate had intervened here too, for I found that Doris, having found a man who could give her the things she thought she deserved, had obtained a divorce some time since and was already married again.

That was ten years ago. Rose and I are married now; as happy as we can be.

I don't think any man has a truer or more loyal wife, and I don't think any children could want a better or sweeter mother than Rose.

I have done everything possible to make myself worthy of her, and I hope I have succeeded; in part, at least.

XI

Blind Desire

EING a girl's first love is risky business," Jack Morton said to me when I told him of my engagement to Kay Thompson. "As soon as she's cut her wisdom teeth on you she'll throw you over for someone else."

Morton was my best friend, and I had a deeper affection for him than I have ever known for any other man, but there were times when that quiet cynicism of his irritated me, and this was one of them. Filled as I was with the wonder of knowing that I *was* Kay's first love, I was in no mood for his bitter wisdom.

I kicked crossly at the smoldering logs in the fireplace, and the sullen flames leaped up.

"You're an unpleasant grouch," I told him. "Just because no woman has ever looked at you—" This was untrue, but I was in a bad humor.

"Too many women have looked at me," he retorted, quite unperturbed, "and looked away again. I know all about them, and——"

"If you knew *anything* about Kay," I interrupted, "you'd see that she isn't to be compared with other women."

At that Morton gave a snort and sat up straight.

"You're talking like a fool schoolboy, Chadwick. How old are you, anyhow?" he asked.

"Twenty-nine. Surely you should remember that!"

"And Kay is—" he pursed.

"Eighteen."

There was a silence. Morton leaned back and relighted his pipe.

"Well," he remarked at last, "you aren't quite old enough to be her father, but you're a darn sight too old to be her husband—just at present, anyhow. If you'd wait five or ten years, the difference in your ages wouldn't seem so great, but at eighteen, eleven years is—why, it's almost a lifetime. If you want my advice——"

"I don't," I snapped. "I came for your congratulations."

Morton rose and laid his hand gently on my shoulder.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "I wish I could congratulate you, but I can't. You're riding for a fall, and you ought to know it as well as I do. Get off before it's too late."

But this was too much for my temper. I shook off his hand, called him a qualified idiot, and left, slamming his door behind me.

I had almost reached the Thompsons' house when, suddenly in the sky above it, a meteor flamed into dazzling brilliance and died as swiftly. Its brightness seemed to me a symbol of the happiness that had come into my life; then that cold fear gripped me again. How quickly that brightness had vanished! I am not superstitious, but that night my nerves were on edge, and the meteor which had gleamed so brightly and died so soon seemed to be a warning. Had Morton been right after all?

I found Kay seated on a low stool before the fire, while Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were busy with their nightly game of cribbage. She did not rise to meet me, but I saw my welcome in her eyes, and as I stood beside her, talking with her parents, she took one of my hands in hers and laid it against her cheek. This conversation—with Mr. and Mrs. Thompson—was always a necessary preliminary to my evenings with their daughter, and I endured it patiently, but inwardly I sighed with relief when Kay rose and led the way into the music room.

Two minutes later she was in my arms and I had forgotten everything except my love for her. But afterwards,

as we sat together on the sofa, I told her of my conversation with Morton.

"I'm afraid he may be right, sweetheart," I ended, "and I don't think I ought to marry you until you've had a chance to fall in love with someone else, if you're going to."

"I don't want to fall in love with anyone else, Hal. I only want you."

"But my darling," I argued, after kissing her, "you've never known anyone else. Your parents have kept you like a princess in a tower. Heaven knows I don't blame them, though," I added. "When you belong to me I'm going to feel like keeping you under lock and key all the time. And I know you wouldn't like that."

"I belong to you now, Hal," Kay told me.

I looked down at her lovely face with its pure lips and deep, clear eyes.

"I wish to God you did, Kay," I answered.

But after a little more argument she agreed to my plan. She was to "come out" at once, and be as gay as she liked for a year. Then, if she still loved me, we would announce our engagement, and be married as soon as possible.

"Or sooner," Kay amended. "And then we can tell your friend what we think of his theories about a girl's first love."

My arms were around her, and I was feeling very happy and very confident. I kissed her dark hair.

" 'The first love is the best,' " I quoted gayly.

"Of course it is," Kay answered, "and this time it will be the *only* love."

The winter passed quickly, although at first I lived in an agony of suspense, wondering miserably which of the other men who flocked around Kay would take her away from me.

As time went on I grew more and more sure of her love. I could see that, while she enjoyed her parties and her

popularity, she was happiest when she was alone with me.

So the blow, when it came, fell from a sky that had seemed all clear and serene.

One warm, fragrant evening in April, I accompanied Kay to a dance. This was a rare privilege, for we were keeping our engagement a close secret, and I was very proud and happy. What an exquisite thing she was, this delicate, untouched Kay of mine!

But when the party was over Kay was nowhere in sight. I went to look for her and found her sitting on a low wall at one end of the terrace. My heart leaped as I looked at her. Leaped—and then stood still, for I saw that she was utterly unconscious of my presence, and completely absorbed by her companion. I was within ten feet of them before she saw me. She jumped up quickly, then—nervously, I thought. Her companion rose, too, and I saw that it was Percy Ware, a good-looking young fellow near her own age whom most women adored and all men found insufferable. So it was he who could interest her to the exclusion of everyone else!

She slipped her arm through mine and talked gayly as we went out to my car. But as we started home she sank back in her corner, staring out into the night.

"Kay," I asked at last, "are you in love with—with that fellow?" I could not bring myself to speak his name.

Kay was utterly incapable of deception.

"Yes, Hal," she answered in a low voice. I had known it, but her words stunned me. We reached her home and I helped her out of the car. Then she laid a light hand on my arm and I saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm so sorry dear," she said softly. "I didn't know—until to-night. I'd often wondered why I enjoyed being with him more than with anyone else—even you, Hal, though I tried to persuade myself that I didn't. You see, I had been so sure that I loved you. But to-night Percy

told me that he loved me—and I felt just as though he were picking me up and carrying me away and I couldn't help myself. I'm sorry, dear."

"It's not your fault, Kay," I managed to say.

The tears brimmed over and I saw them shining on her cheeks.

"I feel—so wicked, Hal."

"You're not wicked, dear," I said, and then the sight of her there, and the realization that I had lost her, were too much for me. I caught her and crushed her in my arms, kissing her blindly, for my own eyes were hot with tears. Then I jumped into the car and drove away as hard as I could go.

I don't remember what happened after that—I was still too dazed—but I packed my things somehow and caught a train, scarcely knowing where I went, or why. I was conscious only of a blind desire to flee from the pain in my heart—yet I knew that, wherever I went, I must carry it with me always.

The months passed. I wrote sometimes to Morton, and it was from him that I learned of Kay's marriage to Percy Ware. Then came the war, and I enlisted. Morton went with me, and died splendidly amid the shell-torn filth of a French battle-field. I came home, feeling more desolate than ever, found a position in Chicago, and tried to persuade myself that I was happy and contented.

One night I went rather late to a dance of the sort that is mildly called "gay."

I was tired that night, and the rowdy, drunken mob filled me with a deadly weariness. I decided to dance once or twice and then go home. So I touched the shoulder of the man nearest me, taking for granted that I knew his partner, although I had not been able to see her face. He released her and disappeared, while I stood looking down at the woman he had left. I had a swift impression of a

pretty face, with hard, laughing eyes and a bitter mouth. Then she cried:

"Hal! Where in the world did you come from?"

It was Kay.

Then, before I could speak, she had flung both arms around my neck and kissed me.

"You dear old thing!" she cried. "It's so nice to see you again!"

Nice! After all the tragedy of our broken love and the wretched years that lay heavily between us! I could not realize that I had found Kay—found her only to learn how completely I had lost her. For this was not my Kay, this careless, painted girl who seemed to have forgotten that she had ever loved me and broken my heart. Then I remembered my old distrust and dislike of Percy Ware. Was it he who had destroyed the Kay that I had loved?

"Let's sit down somewhere," I said. "I want to talk with you."

I followed her down the long hall to the library. She walked with a sensuous grace, deliberately alluring. If I had never seen her before I would have been fascinated, but now I could only wonder how this brilliant, poisonous butterfly, could have come out of the pure chrysalis of my Kay.

The library was deserted. We sat down on a deep couch and Kay rested her dark head against the wall while her beautiful eyes stared into mine with their half-inviting, half-mocking smile. She was exquisite, enticing—yet my first impulse was to leave her, to go away before she should destroy my tender, reverent memories of *my* Kay. Then I looked into her eyes and knew suddenly that she was unhappy. I took both her hands in mine.

"Kay—Kay!" I cried. "What have they done to you?"

"I've grown up, Hal," she told me in her light, hard voice.

"You needn't have grown up like this, Kay. This wasn't the way you started."

Kay looked up at me with a bitter smile.

"'Life is not the thing we know, and not the thing we plan,'" she quoted, "'and Woman in a bitter world must do the best she can.'"

"Don't, Kay," I implored her. "This isn't your best."

"But it *is* my best—now, Hal."

She had drawn her hands away, but I caught them again.

"This isn't true, dear. I won't believe it."

Kay laughed—an odd little laugh, as if she were laughing at herself.

"You don't know how it rots a woman, Hal—being married to a man like Percy."

"The cur! If he's done anything——"

"It isn't what he's *done,* my dear, so much as what he *is* —his whole attitude toward life and women and marriage. That's what has rotted me, Hal."

I bent and kissed her hands to hide the pain that I knew was in my eyes. Yet, hers were hard and uncaring.

"But, my darling—" I began.

An ugly laugh interrupted me, and I sprang to my feet and swung around to see Perry Ware in the doorway with a sneer on his handsome, flushed face.

"A very pretty scene, my dear!" said he to Kay. "Sorry I didn't see more of it." Then he recognized me.

"What the devil are *you* doing here?" he demanded hotly. I was about to reply with equal heat when Kay caught my arm.

"Please," she whispered. "Please—*dear*—" And the wonder of that word held me spellbound.

Then Kay crossed the room with that sensuous gait of hers and stood before her husband. It sickened me, the sight of Kay deliberately charming that beast. I could not see what enticements, what promise lay in her eyes, but I

knew she was speaking to her husband in the only language he was capable of understanding and I shrank from the thought of what she must have suffered in learning it.

But she was letter perfect now. The fellow stopped scowling and put his arm around her with a grudging laugh.

"Let's get out of this racket," he muttered, and as they disappeared I had a fleeting glimpse of Kay's face with its wise, bitter smile. It was several minutes before I recovered sufficiently to realize that I had no idea where I could find her. My first impulse was to inquire of our hostess, but on second thought I decided that this would be unwise. For Kay Ware was the sort of woman about whom rumors spring up all too easily. I was confident now that she loved me, but I knew that her husband would not willingly let her go. There would be trouble enough and, to spare ahead of us, and for Kay's sake I must avoid stirring up gossip that would make things still more unpleasant for her.

But I spent a sleepless night, tormented by the fear that I might not be able to find her again. It was quite possible that she was here only on a visit, and she might be leaving at any time—to-morrow—to-night. Then it might be weeks or months before I could reach her, and in the meantime she would be living with that brute. I groaned aloud at the thought.

There was a large reception the next afternoon, and although I detest the things, I went early, determined to stay until the end in the hope of seeing Kay. For nearly two hours I waited, growing more and more wretched. But at last she came.

She was with a woman I knew, so I spoke to them casually, then awaited my chance to find Kay alone. My heart was beating fast at the thought that now she would be mine, and more surely than if I had never lost her.

At last my opportunity came.

"When may I see you, Kay?" I asked casually, lest someone should hear.

Kay took a sip of tea before she answered.

"When do you want to see me?"

"As soon as possible," I replied in a lower voice.

"To-morrow, then. Do you know that little coffee shop on South Cumberland Street?"

"Yes."

"Meet me there at four o'clock." And with a formal little smile she moved away.

The time finally came. We sat at a little table hidden away behind the stairs in that quaint, enchanting coffee shop, and Kay ordered tea. She had thrown off her sophisticated veneer and actually looked like the girl I had known several years ago. For a few minutes we sat in silence; then Kay turned to me with an attempted laugh and said:

"It's a funny world, old dear. Just think of our being here together—you and I!"

I frowned. She was speaking as though our love had never been, and I could see that she was trying to return to that hard, uncaring mood of hers.

"Let's talk seriously, Kay. We're going to be married, you know——"

"Married?" Kay interrupted me. "But who ever said anything about being married?"

"I thought that was understood," I said.

Her eyes met mine, mocking and defiant.

"You're mistaken, my dear. I have no idea of marrying you." I ignored her statement.

"Tell me, Kay, do you love me?"

"Yes, of course, I love you," she answered calmly, just as if I had asked her whether she liked oysters.

"Kay," I cried, "haven't you any feelings?"

"I don't think I have," she replied in the same matter-of-fact way. "I've put them away, my dear, or worn them out—I don't know which."

"Don't talk that way, Kay," I begged.

"I'm talking the way I feel, Hal. You can't imagine how old and cold and tired I am—inside.

"But you said that you loved me, dear."

"I do love you. At first I was crazy about Percy—I adored him, Hal—but he killed my love, little by little. Then I began to remember you, and how different you had been." She smiled dimly. "You don't know how much I love you, Hal," she told me with that queer little laugh of hers.

I groaned.

"I can't understand you, Kay. You say you love me and then you refuse to marry me."

She made a little impatient gesture.

"Let's talk about something else, Hal."

"Not until we've settled this, dear."

Kay looked at me with eyes like steel.

"It *is* settled, Hal. If you insist on talking about it, I will never come to see you again. But if you promise to drop the subject, we can see each other often." Her eyes softened. "I should like to see you often, Hal."

I promised gloomily. There was nothing else to do.

"Tell me one thing, Kay," I said. "Why have you kept on living with Ware?"

"It's a case of sticking to the devil you know, Hal. If I should leave him, there would always be other men—bothering me. You see, he has destroyed all my defenses, Hal, all the things that women protect themselves with—modesty, and pride, and shame. Men can look in my eyes now and see that my heart is rotten."

"It isn't rotten, Kay. It's only smothered by Ware's rottenness. But why didn't you come to me?"

"You were in France, at first. Besides, I wasn't sure that you wanted me, after the way I'd treated you."

"But now——"

She held up a warning hand.

"You promised, Hal."

The room was deserted now, except for an insignificant looking man who was drinking coffee in a corner. Kay rose.

"We'd better go, dear. I'll come here again to-morrow, if you want me."

"If I want you!" I cried.

I spent another wretched night.

The next afternoon left me as puzzled as ever. Kay's eyes were a little less hard than before, her laughter a little less bitter, and I knew that she was glad of my love and glad to be with me. Yet she still seemed to keep herself just beyond my reach.

We parted at the door lest we should meet someone who knew us. Just as I turned away I almost collided with a man whose face was vaguely familiar, but it was a minute or so before I remembered him. He was the man who had been seated near us in the coffee shop the day before.

I went home with every prospect of another sleepless night. But just after dinner the telephone rang and I heard Kay's voice, tremulous with excitement and something like fear.

"Hal—I must see you—at once—will you come?"

"Of course, dear."

She named a lonely part of the park and hung up the receiver in the midst of my expostulations that it wasn't safe for her to go there alone. There was nothing for me to do but hurry to meet her.

Kay was waiting for me, bareheaded and breathless, with a dark, loose coat over her light dress. She clung to me, trembling.

"Hal—dearest—he's going to kill you, and it's all my fault—" her voice broke.

I put my arms around her. How helpless she was, and how pitifully frightened!

"Nonsense, sweetheart. You mustn't get upset like this, dear. Ware wouldn't touch me."

"But he would, Hal. You don't know him as I do. He's had a detective watching me." Suddenly I remembered the man at the coffee shop. "To-night he came to see Percy and I heard them talking. Then Percy came into my room and his face was terrible. He didn't even speak to me. I slipped out as soon as I could and called up from a drug store. I didn't see the detective anywhere, but he may have been hiding."

"You poor little darling!" I cried. "You needn't have worried about me."

"But he said he would kill you, Hal, if you ever came near me again. He was dreadful the other night, after he found us together. He knows that I love you and he swore that he'd never let me marry you. That's why I made you promise not to ask me, dear. I knew Percy would kill you rather than let you have me."

"But, my darling," I argued, "don't you know that he would never have the nerve to touch me? Frightening a woman is easier than killing a man, Kay—and safer."

But she shook her head.

"You don't know him, Hal. Promise me you'll go away, dear—to-night—at once. Percy may have seen me leave the house. He may have followed me— *Oh!*"

A car had swung suddenly around the rocks at the turn of the road and its headlights were almost upon us. We leaped aside, but at the same instant the car swerved sharply in our direction. Instinctively, I caught Kay and flung her aside; then that blinding monster was upon us, and I felt myself hurled head first onto the sharp rocks. Through the

racket and the burning pain that filled me, I heard Kay's scream. Then there was darkness, and a great cool peace. . . .

It was after an eternity that Kay's voice reached me.

"Hal—Hal—dearest——"

I opened my eyes. There was a hubbub of lights and voices all around, and Kay's face above me.

"What happened?" I whispered.

"It was Percy, dear," she said. "He tried to run us down."

Then I remembered dimly. There had been a car . . . roaring toward us. . . .

"You . . . Kay . . . are you hurt?"

"Not a bit. You saved my life, dear."

That was good. . . . Kay wasn't hurt. . . . I had saved her. . . . Good. . . . Then another thought came.

"Percy?" I asked faintly.

"He's dead, dear," Kay answered in a low voice. "He lost control of the car and it hit the rocks."

But all this was too much for my uncertain consciousness. I closed my eyes. . . .

Then, suddenly, it all burst upon me. Percy was gone . . . Kay would belong to me now . . . and there was no man to put us asunder. . . .

I opened my eyes.

"You're mine, Kay!" I told her. "You're all mine. You've come back to me at last."

Kay bent down to me and kissed my lips.

"The first love is the best, dear," she whispered.

XII

For My Pal's Sake

N WRITING this story, my sole object is to steer young married couples clear of the dangerous reef of indiscretion and to sound a warning before their little bark of happiness is wrecked by temptation. For who hasn't been tempted, some time?

Having been thrown on my own resources since I was twelve years of age, I have traveled a great deal, and have met almost all classes of humanity. One of the finest men I ever met was Harry Brighton, a wealthy farmer in northern Missouri, for whom I worked. The Brighton family consisted of Harry Brighton and his wife, two beautiful and talented daughters, and one son. Billy Brighton was a handsome, big-hearted and exceptionally bright young fellow. He and I were like brothers. I have no brother, but if I had I don't believe I could have thought more of him than I did of Billy Brighton. He was a little wild, but was kindness itself to his father and mother, and he idolized his sisters. Altogether it was a happy family, and I was treated as an equal in every respect.

At last there came a day when Billy was to go away to college to finish his education. We parted sadly, he and I. I remained with the family. The old place seemed lonely after he was gone. We all felt it. I was a little uneasy about my pal. I had had experience, being older than he, and I knew the temptations he was sure to meet. Well, in a few months we began to hear rumors of little escapades he was having; exaggerated reports, I thought, but I knew Billy was stepping out. Finally he was caught in a police

raid on a road house that carried a dance hall and gambling resort in connection with the traffic of liquor. That settled it. The old gentleman was heartbroken, but unforgiving. He went and paid all the costs of the trial and the fine, and brought my pal back in disgrace. Here I must say he was severe, but fair, with Billy. He proceeded to have his estate—stock, and cash, and, in fact, his whole fortune—appraised; then setting aside Billy's part, to the penny, paid him in cash. His part came to $18,000. Then he told my pal to go. I often recall how cruel it seemed to be when he arose, took his boy's hand, and said, "Son, I had counted on you, but you have wilfully disappointed me sadly. I wish you luck, sir, but if you are determined to go downhill you will have to go alone. I'm through. You have your life before you. I'm giving you your chance and now good-by, Bill."

I saw Billy's hands tighten. For once he looked serious. He looked straight into his father's eyes a long minute, and though he was hurt deeply he calmly said, "All right, Pa. I guess this is final, is it not?"

"Yes, Billy, final. Choose your route and may God help you."

It was a sad parting. He kissed his mother and sisters, and turning to me smiled and said, "Well, Frank, old pal, you will hear from me before long. I'm going into business for myself, so wish me luck."

This I did with all my heart. He took my hand in his a moment and was gone.

The old place now seemed lonelier than ever before. The Mother seemed dazed. The girls were very quiet, but I could see they were deeply hurt. I stayed a few weeks, and left them. We had heard that our Billy had gone into the saloon business; he had bought out a small saloon in the city where he had gone to college. This was, of course, long before the Eighteenth Amendment was passed.

I visited for a while in my native state, and then I came to Saville, where Billy was in business. He was highly pleased to see me, and offered me a job as bartender at a good salary, but not being a drinking man I refused with thanks. He then informed me he was going to be married soon to a well-known lawyer's daughter. He had known her when going to school. I congratulated him and the next day landed a job more to my taste for a big commercial company.

The wedding took place in January. I thought I never saw a prettier bride. A golden-haired nymph, delicate looking as Dresden china, but yet vivacious and the picture of health, such was Florence Halles to me. I visited them often, and the more I saw of her the more lovely she seemed to me. Just a sweet, beautiful, good little girl, and she was an ideal hostess.

In a few weeks I noticed a change in Billy. I was puzzled. He began to have moody spells. Something was on his mind. I thought of financial trouble, but he was doing a phenomenal business, so I discarded that thought. Then one night I openly asked him to tell me about his trouble.

"Well, Old Pal," he replied, "mostly imagination, I guess, but come into my private room here a few minutes. I want to talk to you and to ask your advice."

I was surprised that anything serious could be wrong. And then he told me an astonishing thing! In the city of Saville was a character that is often met in the saloon and gambling world—a professional, educated, fine-looking, slick-tongued society gambler. He was dubbed the "Hawk," on account of his prominent nose and piercing black eyes. He was very successful as a gambler, had lots of cash, and no one knew or seemed to care about his past, but it was known that he had been the cause of several divorce scandals and wrecked homes. Naturally, with Billy in the saloon business, the associates that he and Flo had consisted

mainly of the aristocratic sporting fraternity. Many times Bill, being busy, allowed her to go to parties, dances, and social affairs with some of his many friends, and quite naturally she met the notorious Thomas Howe, the Hawk. At first she was amused by the stories she heard about him, then mildly interested, and finally she became strangely attracted to him, with his polished manners and strong personal magnetism. Florence became madly infatuated with him. No one will ever know just how he managed that, but we will have to suppose that it was a case of strong will power over the weaker. Now some near neighbors who were fast friends of Billy's had informed him that they had seen the Hawk going away from his residence at as late an hour as eleven-thirty at night. Billy hardly ever got home before twelve and often as late as one o'clock. Now he knew these clean old folks, and he knew they were sincere, but he harbored the hope that they were mistaken. Being old, he thought their eyes may have deceived them.

I was dumfounded.

Billy at last broke the silence by saying, "Frank, old man, what can I do to prove her innocent? I am sure there is some terrible mistake, but I have got to vindicate her in my own mind, and I have to do it without her knowing that I have heard anything. How can I go about it?"

"Billy," I answered, "it is just a silly mistake of the old folks. You and I both know that the Hawk is scoundrel enough to do anything, but don't harbor suspicion of Flo until you are absolutely sure. Maybe he was the only one attracted, and, like animals of his breed, he may be just trying to get a chance to talk to her. Maybe she don't even know that he was there. And he might have other ideas too. He knows she is often alone, and might be considering burglary. I'll never believe Flo is a party to anything, so be mighty careful, Billy, that she don't hear or see that your suspicions are aroused, for if she is innocent, which I am

sure she is, she could never forget nor forgive you."

He looked up and smiled the old cheerful smile I had seen so often.

"Frank," he said, "you have it doped out just as I had it, and I'll sure be careful how I handle it. But if there should be anything wrong, the Hawk had better have died when he was an infant."

The look in my old pal's eye told me he meant it. He walked to the window and stood for some time, then turned quickly and came back to the little table and looked at me for several seconds. Finally he spoke.

"Frank, old boy, I've got a proposal to make to you. Now you don't have to accept on account of our friendship by any means. Use your own judgment. It is this: you come out and visit us as usual, say to-morrow evening—it'll be Sunday—and while you are there I will suddenly think of Florence being alone so much, and of your paying room rent, and offer to room you there, that it would be safer for Flo. We will see how she accepts it and if all goes through all right you come and room with your old pal. She can't refuse, in any case, and I'll pay you well for your trouble. I feel that in that way we can vindicate her without her even knowing. You can keep a lookout when you should be asleep. What do you think of it?"

Can you imagine my feelings? I was sure she was innocent of wrong, yet the shadow of doubt remained. I told him I would have to think it over.

"Take your time, Old Pal," he replied. "Let me know to-morrow afternoon."

I slept none that night. I always detested a "snitch," and here I was asked by my best friend to act the part. I considered the situation from all angles, and came to the conclusion that I would accept. My intention was to go and stay long enough to assure Billy she was innocent. But if I saw she was guilty I was going to try to save her from

herself. I knew that in case I refused, Billy would plan something else, or send someone else who would be interested only in delivering the goods. I believe you will see my side of this strange situation.

The next afternoon I paid them the visit. She was just the same sweet little Flo, and when Billy adroitly brought up the subject in regard to my making my home with them she seemed actually pleased.

"Sure," she said, "it will be fine all around. When you are late I will have a big brother to look out for me."

I moved out. When three weeks had passed by and not a thing happened that was out of the ordinary, I was sure it was just a case of imagination on the part of the old folks across the street. I would retire at about 8.30 P.M., undress, switch off the lights, then redress and sit at the window and watch until I saw Billy come home. But after I had been on guard nearly five weeks, one night I heard the doorbell ring. I was dozing and started up too late to see who had arrived. But when he came out about an hour later I saw only too plainly the unexpected had happened. All my hopes for Florence's vindication were dashed to the ground. It was none other than the Hawk.

It was a beautiful moonlight night. He hesitated in the shadow of a tree that stood in front of the gate, just long enough to light a cigarette. In the glare of that match I was made doubly sure. No mistake now. I realized in a moment that I held Billy's and Flo's happiness, and the Hawk's miserable life, all in the hollow of my hand. What was I to do? I was getting into pretty deep water. I went downstairs and into the sitting room. I called Flo. The transom over her bedroom door was open. She answered, "Yes?" at the same time inquiring what I wanted. I told her I wanted to talk to her a few minutes, and not to be uneasy or afraid, as it would only be a few minutes. She came out in a silk kimono, looking beautiful as a queen.

"Well, Big Brother, I'm a little surprised. What is it?"

"Flo," I returned, "I am compelled to hurt your feelings. I hate to do this, but I saw Tom Howe just leave. And now, as I am your friend, and you are my best friend's wife, I ask you, little girl, what you can be thinking of to let a cur, a thief, and a home wrecker by profession come to see you at this time of night? Now answer me just as you would your own brother, for you sure need a big brother now."

"Oh," she breathed, "I knew something like this would happen. Oh, what a fool I've been. Frank, I tell you I've not been myself since I met that snake. I offer no excuse. I just don't see myself how this ever happened. He seems to hold some strange hypnotic power over me, but I don't expect you to believe that. Are you going to tell Billy? I suppose you will. Well, it serves me just right. I'm ready to pay."

"Well, Flo," I replied, "that depends altogether on you."

She looked at me a long minute; then, her eyes filled with tears, she asked, "What do you want me to do, Frank?"

"Now what do you think, little girl?" I replied. "Now you get me right. Remember I am a friend of Billy's and therefore I respect you as his wife. I can get you out of this viper's clutches if you want me to. Listen, child, I am going to tell you the truth. I was placed here to catch you and I came to prevent someone else from doing that. I thought that you were innocent when I came, Flo, believe me. I am only interested in Billy's peace and happiness, and saving you from yourself. You are too good, too talented, too beautiful, to allow that beast to draw you down. I'm talking for you and Billy now, Flo. Will you let me help you? If you say yes, I'll run Howe out of town before to-morrow night. If you refuse, he will be a corpse by that time. It is up to you. I know what Billy will do if he ever knows. He loves you too well to get over it if

he learns the truth. Now you are the one to say what to do."

"Frank, can it be possible that, knowing what you do, you are willing to do this for me?"

"Yes, Flo. You are just my little sister now, and you need a big brother's help."

"I'll do anything you say, for I can't do otherwise, but if you get me out of this I promise you I'll never make another blunder as long as I live. I love Billy dearer than my own life, and I can't understand the evil influence Howe had over me. When he was gone I despised him, also myself. But when I looked into those glittering eyes I was helpless. What is your plan, Frank?"

"This," I replied. "To-morrow I'll find Howe. He will be glad he is alive after I get through talking to him. He will drop you like a hot iron, then I'll stay right on here and make no report at all to Billy for two or three weeks. Meantime he can't help noticing the absence of Howe. Then I'll proceed to vindicate you to Billy. After that I can go most any time. How does the arrangement suit you, little sister?"

She broke down and cried for several minutes. At last she raised her tear-stained face, and threw back her golden hair, and offered me her little hand.

"Frank, I can't find words to tell you how much I thank you. You are sure white. I am leaving my fate in your hands." And she smiled for the first time during that interview. A poor little tear-drenched smile, but what a smile! I bade her good night, and later, when Billy came in, I could hear them talking and I actually heard her laugh merrily at something he told her.

Next evening I found Howe. I was armed. I knew the kind of reptile I had to deal with and I was not going to give him a chance. I met him in a gambling resort. I bought him a drink. He accepted, then offered to return

the compliment, but I told him I wanted a talk with him. I told him it was important and that it must be in private. We adjourned to a back room and ordered another drink, for which he paid. He looked at me keenly and said, "Well, Frank, shoot! What's on your mind?"

I looked him in the eye and replied, "Oh, nothing much, Tom. Just a sweet little woman's happiness, and your worthless life, that's all."

And as I said that I covered him with my gun. He got himself together quickly; he was a good actor. He looked at me sarcastically and asked:

"Are you crazy, kid?"

"Howe," I said, "when I am through with you, you won't think I'm crazy. You've got to listen to me whether you wish to or not, and if you make a false move, well . . ."

He looked ghastly now. The smile froze on his face. I told him to keep his hands on the table.

"Howe," I commenced, "I know all about your little affair with Flo. Don't lie! It will do you no good. You came at ten o'clock last night, stayed one hour, lit a cigarette at the gate. Am I right?"

He answered, "How much do you want? I'll pay anything in reason. Say it."

"You are such a low-lived cur that you can't believe there are any men in the world. You don't understand the meaning of the word *manhood*. What I wish to make you understand, Howe, is this: I was placed there to watch and catch you. Billy is not sure. He wants above all else to vindicate his wife in his own mind, without her knowing he ever suspected her. He wants to know she is innocent, see the point? He asked me to watch for you. I was terribly surprised to see you come and go. I don't believe you are human. I know Billy, and if I tell him the truth your life is not worth a canceled postage stamp, and if he failed to kill you I'd do it myself. The proposition is this: Leave

town to-morrow—forever. Promise not to communicate with Flo in any way or come where she can ever see you. Then I'll keep silent as to the truth. Not for your sake, Tom Howe, but for theirs. Make your decision and be quick about it."

He studied only a moment, then spoke thus:

"Frank, I have never known until to-night what a rotter I have been, never looked at it just that way. To-morrow at nine I'll leave for Memphis, and you won't see me any more. Put away the gun, Frank. You don't need it now. And I'll say you are white, too white for me to understand. Some day, maybe, I'll realize it. Will you shake hands with me?"

"On the agreement I will," I replied, "but not as a friend. I can't."

"Oh, all right then," he said. "On the bargain. And, Frank, I'll stick, too. Good-by."

And so the Hawk left Saville. In about two weeks I assured Billy that the old folks' eyes and imagination had scared him unnecessarily and chided him for being a jealous boy. He laughed and said he guessed he was getting to be a big dunce.

The reform wave struck the country about this time, and also woman suffrage, and out went the saloons. Billy went into the real estate business and did well. I went to see him and Flo once a year and sometimes oftener. I was always welcome. They were blessed with two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. The boy Flo called Frank, and the daughter Billy named Laura, because he knew I had a sister by that name whom I loved dearly. They taught them when babies to call me Uncle Frank and he never knew just why Flo called me her big brother, and often she would flash me a slow understanding smile when we were all together.

Several years ago I received a telegram from Billy that pneumonia had suddenly taken his dear wife. I rushed by

first train to be at the funeral. Billy met me at the station, but he was not the old cheerful Billy I had always known; he looked worn and haggard now.

"Well, Frank," he said, "I wanted to meet you myself. I have all this world's goods I'll ever need, but I don't see how I am going to live without her. Frank, it hurts me, but I'm always so glad that she never knew it."

Well, all I could do was to grasp him by the hand and say, "Billy, old pal, you have my heartfelt sympathy, and I am sure she thought the world of you always."

We arrived at the house. Flowers were banked in profusion around the casket. She had many friends. I stood and looked at her a long time. She was as beautiful in death as in life, seemed to be just ready to smile that slow sweet smile, and I almost thought I heard her whisper, "Big Brother."

And now my story is about ended. Five years ago I attended my pal's funeral also. Billy was never the same man after Flo was gone, and I am sure when he joined her over there it was a happy meeting. And if it is possible to exchange confidences there, he knows our secret now. But I don't think he will ever blame his old pal for deceiving him, and I wonder if they don't sometimes look down on me and smile when they think of how I tried to save them.

XIII

Life's Pay Day

IN THE twilight of a May day two men sat at the desk of a church study. The mellow light fell softly upon the gray hair and kindly face of the elder, the expression of which was dreamy and meditative. He was seeing visions—an old man's visions of the past. The younger waited rather breathlessly.

For an hour they had argued modern morality. Youth claimed that present social conditions fully justified the doctrine of a one-time famous college professor that each individual owed it to himself to attain his own ambition—that therein lay happiness. Age declared that only in self-sacrifice to the rights and happiness of others lay the road to peace of soul and, hence, to true and abiding joy.

The silence lengthened as the one-time rugged frame settled deeper into the old armchair; the gray head thrust itself forward slightly, and the long thin finger tips met and clung softly together. Not for worlds would the ardent exponent of individual self-expression have broken in upon the train of thought that precluded one of these precious revelations which had vicariously enriched his knowledge of human life and experience. He waited until thought had crystalized into words.

The old clergyman began slowly. His voice seemed to come from far away, as though his physical body had drifted back into the years with his thoughts.

"I knew the day had ended. The old sexton had passed my door with his never-failing 'Good night, your Riverince,' and the distant vesper bell told me it was time to close

mind and heart to the struggles, sorrows and sins of the weary city, time to turn to that haven of rest—my home.

"I had snapped off the center lights, and had my hand outstretched to shut off my desk lamp, intending to rest in the shadowy evening, when a light knock fell on the door. Selfish weariness whispered 'Pay no heed,' but the knock came once more, quiet and insistent. The need of another human soul forced an unwilling 'Come in' from my lips.

"The door opened and a woman stepped inside. With a rather impatient 'Well, madam, what can I do for you?' I pressed the button and flooded the room with light.

"A single glance at her figure was quite sufficient to reveal to me the age-old story. With a feeling of disgust at the sordidness of life I requested her to be seated and leaned back prepared to hear the usual story of abuse, ill luck, or desertion.

" 'Won't you please turn out those lights again?' The exquisite modulations of the voice that uttered rather a command, than a petition brought me upright and, even as I obeyed her request, her face became stamped indelibly upon my consciousness.

"A face to make a merely human man immediately desire to become a Galahad. So nearly faultless of feature that it would have lacked character, but for her firm mouth and small determined chin. And her eyes. Ah! those eyes! Clear, innocent, steadfast, no cringing guilt there, but such trouble and bewilderment that my experience-hardened heart was wrung.

"As the lights went out she sank into a chair before me where the single lamp shed its light upon her face.

" 'I will not detain you long,' the soft voice said. 'I hated to intrude at this hour, but I felt I could not come until you were sure to be alone. Perhaps, sir,' the slight southern accent accomplished my complete capitulation—my own mother came from Alabama, 'you will remember visit-

ing our small town of Compton about this time last year. We were giving an entertainment and you brought some singers from your church to assist us.'

"As she spoke, a little shutter of my mind opened, and though the gentle voice went on with her story, I scarcely heard, as memory painted a picture so vivid that I was amazed. I had failed to recognize her at once.

"The pleasant bustle of the little country church; the happy faces of young and old; the little company of youths and maidens performing with not unpleasing skill; but like a lily, pure and innocent in a garden of gorgeous roses, was the little southern girl who charmed us all with her music; whose fragile beauty had played upon our hearts as her small hands played upon her harp. I saw with startling distinctness her dark eyes raised in unconscious adoration to the ardent, tender face of my golden-voiced tenor, and I did not need to hear his name as she concluded, 'And so, sir, I thought perhaps your influence with Henry might show him that for our child's sake we can no longer avoid the publicity of marriage.'

"I sat amazed, aghast—Henry Gavin—my pride—the delight of my music-loving soul, the popular idol of old and young.

"And yet, I had of late felt a vague uneasiness about him. Henry's merry laugh sounded forced and cold. His eyes had lost something of their clear frankness; and oftentimes I had fancied I caught a flaw in the absolute perfection of his voice. I had reproached myself that I was becoming suspicious, cynical. Now a dozen subterfuges and evasions revealed themselves so clearly.

"As, with a heavy heart, I called his number, his vibrant voice sounded slightly reluctant, but with some demur he agreed to come over to my study.

"We sat in silence, only a slight movement of her hands betrayed her nervous tension. As his step sounded in the

corridor, I turned on the lights, and opened the door. He crossed to where she sat.

"She raised her hand pleadingly to him. He had only accusations to heap upon her.

"He finally struck aside her outstretched hand in cold anger that chilled my slightest hope for her.

"He made it perfectly clear that in coming to me she had disobeyed his express commands, and had forfeited in this betrayal any consideration he might have had for her.

"He had loved her, yes, but his music was his mistress. He would sacrifice any interest in life to his art. No man made a success in life who bound himself to a woman early in his career. He would provide for her, but marry her—never!

"Like little icicles that, loosened by the noonday sun, fall one by one to the pavement, words fell from between her stiffened lips.

" 'You are quite right, you shall never marry me.' A proud dignity enveloped her as she turned: 'Sir,' she addressed me, 'will you secure from this gentleman an oath that he has no claim upon my child?'

"I had turned to the telephone, when a sharp cry made me whirl. The cowardly cur had attempted to leave, but she had slipped before him and turned the key. I verily believe he would have struck her had they been alone.

"I have often thought God had Henry Gavin in mind when he fashioned me, for He had given me great physical strength. None too gently I swung him into his very chair, and kept my eyes on him as I called Evelyn, my wife.

"My desk clock ticked like the beating of a heart in the heavy silence that ensued.

"At my wife's rap a smothered oath broke from Gavin. Evelyn's outstretched hand fell slowly, and her friendly smile faded as she took in the scene. Alas, the life of a clergyman's wife makes wise the simple!

"My beloved crossed the room and taking the girl's hand turned to face Gavin with motherly protection in look and gesture.

"I had always adored her; always marveled at her unerring intuitions, but I was not prepared for this complete comprehension of the situation, and I almost worshiped her at that moment.

"I wrote a brief statement, and Gavin signed it with sullen mutterings. My wife and I sadly witnessed his repudiation of all claim on the child he had fathered.

"Did some premonition strike his cold selfishness? Did some faint realization of the wealth of love he was spurning, touch him? I cannot say. I saw him hesitate a breathless moment, and gaze upon the girl he had so cruelly wronged. My eyes sought her face, but its cold impassivity and blank eyes held not a glimmer of interest as, with a shrug, he went out.

"At the sound of the closing door she started as from a dream, folded the paper she held, and prepared to leave.

"My wife was sobbing openly and this distressed her. She touched Evelyn softly. 'It is strange that you should weep,' she said strainedly. 'I think I shall never weep again.'

"Her frozen calm was pitiful, heart-rending.

"Evelyn whispered— 'Oh, do not let her go!'

"Gently I took her cold hands in mine, and urged her to give us her confidence. Evelyn knelt beside her and clasped her arms about her. Her face quivered and she laid her head upon the breast of the woman whose love seemed to enfold her. She shed no tears but began to tell her story.

"Born in the South, she had been orphaned a few years ago. Her only living relative, her mother's sister, had gone to her at once and become a second mother to her. They had come North to the aunt's home at Compton, and her life had been comparatively happy.

"Her aunt had retained many of the old southern customs. Their income was sufficient, and the girl had not realized how she had missed her old environment until that fatal evening.

"From the very first Gavin had urged her to come to him, and such had been her utter surrender that she had never regretted the move, though, from the first, he had preached the doctrine of free love. He had made her believe that the very fact that no legal ties held them made their bond of love stronger and more enduring.

"The cold, calculating selfishness of his soul had never dawned upon her, even when she realized that their coming child made no change in him. But while she had been willing to sacrifice herself, that instinct of motherhood which protects its young against all the world, even the father of its being, rose up within her, and she had used every argument within her power to change his attitude toward marriage; even offering to go away immediately that she and her baby might be no burden.

"To all her prayers and entreaties he had been adamant, though in all else he was loving and tender. She had come to me as a last hope, and now he stood revealed. She had no plans beyond having made provision for her hospital entrance. With a little gesture of finality she ended her story.

"Then Evelyn, whose emotions had alternated between pity and indignation, rose to her feet and pronounced judgment.

" 'Never again shall he have the opportunity to claim either you or the child, my dear,' she promised. 'For the present you must come to us; be our very welcome guest until the hour of your trial. Afterwards we will plan for you and yours.'

"To my question as to what she had told her aunt, Alice, for so we called her ever after, told me that her aunt thought

she was employed in social service work; that she had gone home once or twice, and the dear old lady was quite content so long as she was happy.

"Here the tears, so long withheld, began to steal down her cheeks as she realized the pain and shame she must cause that loving heart.

"When I asked if I should not act as mediator, the appealing gratitude of the dark eyes raised to mine unmanned me and I hastily suggested that we go to the parsonage.

"A letter to the aunt, telling her that her niece was in trouble, brought that little old-world lady to us next day. I met her and took her to the study where, as gently and carefully as I could, I gave her the few brief facts.

"We ministers see much that is appalling and degrading in human nature; but now and then it is our great privilege to behold the 'God in man' triumphant. As the small body straightened, the quivering chin grew still, and two brave eyes looked into mine. I knew all would be well, for true mother love was there.

"I called the house and asked that Alice come. Beyond hearing a little cry as she ran into the arms outstretched to receive her and a crooning sound as a mother makes to her sick child I knew not what passed between them.

"I hurried home to still the anxious fears of my own best beloved. We rejoiced in the love that triumphs over wrong thus sent to heal our souls so seared by the pitiless selfishness of Gavin.

"Beyond a consultation with the heads of my musical committee, in which they agreed that we engage a new tenor, I knew nothing of Gavin for many years.

"Then I learned that he had indeed gone the way of the world, and for a time had achieved his ambition; but the golden apple must have changed to dust and ashes in his mouth. Eventually his voice had left him, and his world friends had forsaken him.

"Alice had a beautiful boy, completely her own, bearing no likeness to his father. In order to secure him and herself from possible molestation, she assumed her mother's name, Dorothy Corbin and named her son, Franklin, for her mother's father. I asked if I might add George, my name and that of our one dear son who barely saw the light of this world.

" 'That,' she said, 'would fill my cup of gratitute to overflowing.'

"And so we baptized him 'George Franklin Corbin,' but she called him 'George.'

"For a short time they stayed in our city, and Alice's devotion to her aunt was only second to that which she gave her son. She never spoke of her experience but once—in the hospital.

"On that occasion as she sat with her wee babe in her arms she looked up in an agony of remorse and said, 'How could I have been so wicked as to forget how a child would be punished through my sins?' And snatching him to her breast she breathed a prayer that she might be the one to suffer, not he.

"They left us and went to a distant city where, through the influence of an old family friend, Alice took up her music and by teaching added sufficient to their revenue to allow them to live in comfort.

"Frequent letters told us of George's wonderful beauty and marvelous development. Once no word came for weeks, and later we learned that they had gone down into the Valley of the Shadow with him, but now he was recovering.

"Some twelve years after they left us, Alice wrote that the dear little auntie had gone from them; that she was returning from the old southern home where they had laid her to rest.

"She was bringing George that we might judge if our goodness had been rewarded and that, child though he was,

he might express their gratitude before it was too late.

"The years had dealt kindly with us and we did not feel as though we were nearing the end of our journey, but we looked forward with eager anticipation to seeing the boy.

A few days later I heard my wife's voice outside my study door and saw it open slowly and a slight little figure stood before my desk. 'Sir,' he asked, 'are you George Sr?'

" 'I am, and you are George Jr,' I shouted, as I tossed him to my shoulder. Two arms went about my neck in a tight hug and a shy little kiss brushed my cheek.

" 'Oh,' he cried, 'this must be like having a daddy!'

"My throat tightened, but I answered cheerily, 'Well, it is having a granddaddy.' And then we went out to bring in the mothers.

"Did I say years had dealt kindly with us? They had been most gracious to Alice, for her mature beauty far surpassed the fragile beauty of her youth. George, too, was a beautiful, manly lad, and we felt that great indeed was our reward.

"A few hours later, Alice told us she wanted us to hear George sing. I was startled. Could it be that George's one inheritance from that poor selfish father had been his golden voice? It was indeed true, and we sat enthralled as the exquisite flute-like voice rang out.

"With no shyness he sang song after song, till, at his mother's signal, he ran to her, looked adoringly into her face and asked, 'Did I please you, Mother?'

"Our spellbound silence told her better than words the joy we could not express, and she kissed him softly.

"Then she told us that when he was a mere baby she had discovered the wonder of his voice and had most carefully, with the aid of her old music master, preserved and cultivated it.

"Now she was going to New York to find a master for him.

"'I have found him for you,' I cried. 'I found him thirty years ago in Europe, when we were both students. Once more my bread cast upon the water is returning to me!'

"But here my wife interrupted to tell Alice all about the little musician who for many years had besought us to come to New York that he might pay a small debt of gratitude he felt he owed since those dear student days.

"Now I would be doing him a further service by sending him our Alice, and he was just the man in all America to whom George could be safely trusted.

"We took our long planned trip, and all turned out as I had promised. Evelyn and I found we were rather past our youthful capacity for enjoyment and were glad to get home to our own dear fireside.

"Of George we heard regularly, and ever he was mounting up and up. Alice, too, was studying again, and always appeared as George's accompanist.

"The years slip by so quickly as life runs on, and it seemed but a year or two till we received news that he had returned from Europe where he had swept the musical world from its feet.

"His arrival in New York was a pageant of triumph, but we could not go and they wrote they would come to us soon.

"Ah me! Before they came Evelyn had slipped away, and I was left the loneliest of men, but they did come to reverence and honor her in death and George sang at the beautiful Requiem service.

"They came again when he sang to raise funds for my orphanage—the darling project of my old age. They wanted me to be one of the party, but I had no heart for that. I just slipped in quietly to be lost in the crowd and, unobserved, discover the secret of George's magical influence upon the mass of humanity.

"As the lights went down, and he led his mother to the

front of the stage to receive the thunder of applause that greeted them, I heard a strangled cry beside me, and saw a man lean out, grasping the seat in front with hands so strained that the cords stood out like ropes and the knuckles grew white. When George's first numbers were over, and the lights flashed on I turned to look at the man. Our recognition was simultaneous. It was Gavin!

"Once more the marvelous voice rang out, but my heart was heavy. What would this discovery mean to Alice and George?

"The following morning George came to my study once more, and I told him. He looked troubled.

"'I would not like her to know, sir!' he said. 'Could you locate him?' I could, for I had seen to that, knowing that he would ask.

"George flushed a little when he beheld the wretched being who had repudiated him before his birth. He did not address his father but, holding out a slip of paper he had taken from his pocket, he said to me:

"'You will remember this, sir. The original is in the bank.'

"It was a copy of the oath his father had signed at that very table twenty years before, mute but, binding evidence.

"'He can make no legal claim upon either of us now,' George went on, 'but we would not want to feel he lived in want. I will send you monthly a check for him, so long as he remains here and makes no attempt to inform my mother of his existence.' How proudly his voice rang on that dear name! 'I think that is all, sir,' he added.

"He wrote two checks, put them on the desk and, taking my face in his hands, kissed me on both cheeks.

"'Good-by, my dear, dear George Sr. My granddaddy,' he whispered chokingly, and with tears running down his face he turned and left us.

"I picked up the checks; one for the poor wretch before

me, which he grasped with greedy clutching fingers, and with a look of utter hatred, stumbled out.

"The other took my breath by its munificence. Now, indeed, I could build my orphanage!

"As I thought of mother and son at the top of this world's pinnacle of fame and success, and of the man who had but lately lurched out of my doorway, the prophetic voice of old rang in my soul, 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.'"

His voice died away. Then he started as from a deep sleep.

"I am a garrulous old man," he smiled, "and you are a young wretch to beguile me into wandering in a far-off land. Go home and worship your god of self-expression. You will grow old yourself one day, and Life will teach you the truth as it does to all of us as we struggle through the years."

XIV

A Woman Between Two Fires

SOME wives cling to their husbands because they love them, others for social position, wealth, ease; some even because they lack courage to face life alone; a vast number follow the groove of least resistance, and still more cling for the sake of children, long after love has fled.

For me such reasons do not exist. Years of misery brought about through the weakness of the man whose name I bear have deadened my love; the position I hold in civic and club life has been won by myself; what property we have, I have accumulated, for I have proved my ability in business.

I cling to my husband, even though it brings sorrow, degradation and eventual shame, for the same reason that one pays a blackmailer money—I dare not do otherwise.

It was an unsophisticated miss who stood on the depot platform of that small country town, waiting for the train which was to bear her to the city, years ago.

The miss was I, going forth to seek my modest fortune. Equipped with all the knowledge of dots, dashes and pothooks the business college branch afforded, I was ready to prove my ability as a stenographer to anyone who would give a beginner a chance. My parents did not want me to leave the home nest, but there were no opportunities in this small town, so reluctantly they consented.

I was very young and I looked it, but had great independence of spirit and scorned to ask questions. Accord-

ingly, when I reached the metropolis, I entered the bus indicated by the most vociferous crier and was driven to a hotel which I afterwards learned was far, far too gay a place for a simple young thing like myself.

I realized this as I registered in the well-filled lobby, when a man with eyes I did not like watched me from under lids that hung low. Still more I realized this half an hour later, when a knock came at my door. Cautiously I opened it to find the same man claiming acquaintance.

"Surely this is my old friend, Ida Weaver, from S——" he reached out his hand with a smile that meant to be engaging.

To me it was diabolical and I assured him, very shortly, that he had made a mistake and I closed the door and locked it.

It was six o'clock when I arrived. Although I had a country girl's healthy appetite, I did not venture out for dinner. I feared to again encounter those sinister eyes. The next morning I paid my bill and asked to be directed to a girl's boarding house. I had had enough of hotel life. I left hurriedly, but not so hurriedly, as the man followed and tried to assist me with my bags. I finally made him understand that even though I might look as verdant as the Emerald Isle, his overtures were wasted on me.

Soon I was domiciled in a quite place which the kindly secretary had recommended to me. Here I remained for several months.

I secured a position as secretary for Clifford Munson, junior member of a large construction company. Then began for me the tragic romance of my life, for through it came all the trouble of later years. Clifford Munson was young, polished, fascinating, with a handsome though arrogant face, so different from the country lads I had known. I had all the sweet freshness of girlish innocence. In him I saw the ideal of my youthful dreams. There were

As I registered at the desk, a man with eyes I did not like watched me from under lids that hung low.

other girls with the company, older than I, to whom he also was attractive. He was very popular with them, I soon learned, and had once taken Hazel Budd, who had a beau for every night in the week, to dinner. She was the prettiest girl in the office and had since cherished the hope that she would be made his secretary. This was dispelled when I was employed, but she still kept a proprietary eye on him.

My work pleased him and he told me so. Not for a moment did I imagine that he would become interested in me, when there were such bright, attractive girls around him, poised with the assurance that years of city contact alone can bring. One day, in taking dictation, I dropped my notebook. I stopped to pick it up. So did he. Our hands met. With the meeting came an electric thrill such as I had never before experienced. I drew away, blushing confusedly.

The next morning, Saturday, he greeted me with more than his usual cordiality.

"I was just wondering, Miss Huntley, if you would do me a favor." He looked at me questioningly.

Surely he could read my answer as I smiled assent.

"I have specifications which must be out by Monday. I can't touch the work to-day. Would it be asking too much to have you help me out to-morrow when we can be undisturbed?"

My heart sang at the opportunity, but outwardly I was calm as I assured him I would be on hand.

The next morning, I dressed more painstakingly than usual. Ornamented with the few bits of finery I possessed and wearing my most becoming outfit, simple enough to be sure, I hastened to the office.

"How charming you look, little lady," was his greeting. And because I tried not to, again I was blushing.

To cover my confusion, I opened my notebook and for an hour he dictated. Then for a long moment he paused.

Finally I glanced up to find his eyes fastened on me strangely.

"Oh, pshaw, little girl," he began, as he swept the book out of my hands, "I didn't have you come down here to take dictation—that was only a subterfuge. I want to get better acquainted with you. In this glass cage, day after day, with a dozen eyes watching, I have had no chance," and before I could realize what had happened, his arms were around me. Then he kissed me in a strange, exquisite way that, while it frightened me, filled me with emotions I had never known. I tried to draw away from him but he held me closer.

"You dear little baby," he whispered, "how wonderfully sweet you are!"

I begged him to let me go, but he silenced me with caresses. I was powerless under the spell he had woven over me. It was late when I reached home that gladsome day, the innocent beginning of a sorrowful end.

At the office next day, Miss Adams, for years secretary to the president of the company, called me aside.

"You worked here at the office yesterday with Mr. Munson?" she interrogated.

"Yes," I answered, hoping my voice would betray nothing. "He had specifications he was in a hurry to get out."

"It is not necessary, Miss Huntley, for you or any of the other girls to do Sunday work, and I am surprised that Mr. Munson should ask you. He knows Mr. Woodward would not approve of it. Besides, my dear, you are too young and pretty to come here alone with Clifford Munson. I know that boy too well. He has a winning way, but he should try his wiles on women of the world, not on a girl as innocent as you are. For your own sake, little girl, do not come again."

Dear "big sister" Miss Adams! If only I had heeded her kindly advice. I stammered some reply, but inwardly

I resented her interference. Besides, Clifford loved me. He had told me so many, many times during those happy hours yesterday. Of course I believed him. It is easy to believe when one loves. However, at the first opportunity I told Clifford what she had said.

"Did old Sis Adams say that?" He laughed. "She's a good old scout—very puritanical—and I think a lot of her. She has been so faithful to the company. But, Baby," the name he had adopted for me, "like most girls of her uncertain age, she is apt to be a bit catty when some sweet youngster like yourself comes into the office. She'd be tickled pink if I asked her to come down on Sunday, or any other time, for that matter. And she'd do it, too. Not much chance, though, as long as I have a darling like yourself for my own private secretary, as well as for my sweetheart. But just so she won't make trouble—she might report it to the old man (meaning the president)—we'll keep our little love affair our own happy secret until——"

Our conversation was then interrupted, and once more we were back to business. His words reassuring me, however, but it was difficult to hide my joy. I wanted to tell everybody, and most of all the girls in the office, who angled after him so openly, but so unsuccessfully, but it was not to be. For eight hours each day, Clifford Munson and I were employer and employee. Evenings, our relationship was much dearer.

So passed many months, in which I was alternately happy and remorseful, for I had a conscience which at times talked even louder than my love for Clifford Munson. Clifford made light of my scruples.

"Marriage for me is out of the question right now, Baby. But when I am a little more solid with the old man," he added, "why, things will be different. Meantime, you are the sweetest girl in the world, but I can't let you wear an engagement ring, for fear the office will guess our secret."

With this weak excuse I had to be satisfied. I was so foolishly fond of him, however, that so long as he was near, I was inordinately happy. It was only when I was alone that the qualms came.

Then suddenly he was called East to be gone for several weeks. The night I bade him good-by, my heart seemed broken. He, too, was greatly affected, but I did not then know the reason. The day after he left, I received a letter from him, telling me.

"Forgive me, Baby," it read. "I did not have the heart to tell you, but when I return I'll bring my bride with me—the girl to whom I've been engaged for years. Forget me if you can."

Forget the man who, after I had given all, tossed the gift lightly away! Forget him who lacked the courage to tell the truth, yet had the heart to take all a girl holds dear, with no thought of anything in return save lies and deceit and misery! Forget such a creature! If humanly possible, I would. My love was killed, but my pride was born.

I went to the office the next day as if nothing had happened. When Miss Adams remarked, for my special benefit, as I thought, that Clifford would bring home a wealthy bride, I lied beautifully as I answered, "Yes, he told me all about her. Showed me her picture one day. An adorable girl whom he has loved for years."

Secretly I determined to be far from the office of Woodward & Munson when he returned, for never willingly would I look upon his face again. I was astonished to find how my love had turned to loathing. The scars I bore were from shame, humiliation, hurt pride, remorse, that will remain with me until I die. Then came a letter from him, saying that the wedding had been indefinitely postponed, that he was returning very soon. Would I meet him?

I would not, I thought, as I savagely tore the letter into bits, no matter if he offered marriage a hundred times.

I strolled into a restaurant in a reckless mood, for the receipt of the message, even though I no longer loved the man, had bolstered up my pride a bit. A woman likes to feel that she is the one who terminates a love affair, and his letter had made this possible for me. I ordered a good dinner and prepared to enjoy a solitary banquet. In this I was to be disappointed. A man was assigned to the table with me. Imagine my discomfort to discover in him the one who had annoyed me at the hotel on my arrival in the city, nearly a year ago.

I had a hope that he would not recognize me, but it was short lived.

"Oh, here is my little girl from the country," he said with an ingratiating smile, "but how sophisticated she has grown, although as pretty as ever. Surely now she will not repulse my advances so disdainfully!"

Abhorrent though he was, I could not but smile at his conceit. I felt secure there in a public dining room, but how to escape from his unpleasant attentions afterwards was troubling me. He talked constantly as I hurriedly ate my meal; how he had tried to find me; that I was the type that appealed to him; that I was too attractive to be working; of what he would do for me if given a chance. Abruptly I left the table, hoping to foil him in this manner. Quickly I paid my bill and hastened out, but he was at my heels. Anxiously I looked for a policeman, for I was not going to be further annoyed. None was in sight, but instead a good-looking, substantial man of about thirty was approaching.

Desperately I took a chance.

"Oh, Mr. Jones," I appealed to the man now directly in front of me, "how glad I am to see you at this time! Will you please help me?"—with a meaning side glance at the man so closely following—"I am eager to catch a train, and if you will call a taxi for me, I shall appreciate it."

The stranger sensed the situation instantly.

"Most certainly I will," he assured me, "and at the same time relieve you of unpleasant company," with a straight look at the man who had now slunk behind.

That was the beginning of my acquaintance with the man I married. After voicing my gratitude for extricating me from a situation which had begun to be embarrassing, he insisted upon accompanying me home, but in such a courteous way I could not refuse.

Then began an earnest, sincere courtship, for from the moment of our meeting, Will Owens loved me as deeply as it is possible for man to love woman. He was a man of high ideals, whom I admired and respected tremendously. His wooing was as tempestuous as Clifford's had been, with this difference—it was built upon the safe foundation that had marriage as its ultimate, whereas Clifford had for me only a man's passion for a plaything. I tried to ward off the proposal I knew was coming, for I felt so unworthy of the deep love he had to offer. But it was inevitable. Before I had known him a week, he asked me to be his wife. I answered by telling him the story of my folly, then awaited his judgment. It was a kind one, for he folded me close in his arms as he said:

"We all make mistakes, sweetheart. I've made many. Let us not allow the unwisdom of your first love to keep you from knowing a second and greater love. You will love me some day, dear, as devotedly as I now love you."

He seemed so big and strong, a veritable Rock of Gibraltar. Perhaps it was weakness on my part, but oh, how I welcomed the haven he offered!

Will was leaving the following week for an extended business trip. Because he did not want to leave me alone and because I wanted to be far from Woodward & Munson when Clifford returned, I consented to his pleadings for an immediate marriage.

Soon I was a bride, and had there been no Clifford Mun-

son in my life I would have been a gloriously happy one. Will was wonderful to me, kind, considerate, tender. The future presaged joy and peace. Then the first blow fell.

When I had left home, I was utterly unacquainted with facts every girl should know. Will and I had been married but a week when I made a staggering discovery. Oh, the tragedy of it all, as I faced the sordid truth—a further reminder of the man we both were trying to forget! And the wonder of it, Will loved me through it all. Such love, I say, is seldom met among men.

I was still a child, barely eighteen, but overnight I was made a woman. From that moment I resolved in every way humanly possible to atone, to lessen the load of sorrow I had brought my husband through the sin of my youth. I even begged to go away from my husband, to never let him see me again. To this he would not listen.

"If ever you needed me, girl, it's now!" he replied.

I worshiped Will for his goodness and thanked Providence for his protection.

But my debts were only accumulating. The payment was merely put forward a few years to allow interest to compound. As one sows, how truly does one reap. How recklessly must I have sown, to reap the abundant harvest of sorrow that has been mine!

We had been married two years—two years of blessedness and peace, save for the regretful pangs that were mine when my mind dwelt on the past. The love Will Owens inspired in me was a far different thing from the passion Clifford Munson had aroused. Those old days seemed so remote, as if they had never been a part of the real me. I was a loved and loving wife, a fond and tender mother. The love I bore my little Helen seemed reflected in Will Owens' noble heart. I had gone through the fiery furnace and had been purified. But not enough, evidently, not enough. Else why the bleak years that followed?

I do not know when I noticed a change in Will, it came on so subtly. I found myself looking at him closely, suspiciously, for some reason I could not fathom.

His business necessitated traveling and he wanted me to be with him. For his sake, I left little Helen with my mother for weeks at a time. Much of the time we lived in hotels. He had invited friends to luncheon when I suffered my first humiliation at his hands. He seemed in his usual spirits as we entered the café. Before the meal had progressed far, his eyes became heavy, his lids drooped, his head nodded, his mouth relaxed—an unhappy condition for a host. In vain I tried to arouse him by nudging him under the table. He appeared but half-conscious of what was going on about him. When addressed, he would pull himself together with a start, make a momentary effort to appear normal, only to slump down again worse than before.

At length the embarrassing affair drew to a close. I felt I must make some apology, must shield Will in some way. I had been so proud of him heretofore. I turned to the ladies as we left the table.

"Will has given up drinking." (This was in pre-Volstead days.) "He used to drink rather heavily, you know. He has now become such an abstainer that he can't even stand a glass of beer. Did you notice how perfectly stupid he appeared at the luncheon table, all because of the harmless glass of Budweiser he had?"

Of course they had noticed nothing, they hastened to assure me.

As soon as I was alone with Will, I began:

"What is it, dear, that has come over you of late? You are not yourself. I have noticed it for some time, and particularly to-day at lunch when you were almost overcome with an unnatural drowsiness. It can't be drink, since you have given it up almost entirely. What is it? Surely you can tell me and let me help you?"

To all my pleadings, he made no answer; became irritable, in fact, and finally told me to say no more about it. His condition grew more and more noticeable, however, until I began to dread to appear in public with him. At times, he would be unusually bright, almost hilarious. Frequently he suffered from fits of extreme nervousness, which disappeared as quickly as they came. I dared not question him further, for he became moody and silent when I did so, often leaving me alone in the hotel room, not to return until early morning hours.

At last I consulted a doctor. In a very few words I was told that my husband was a drug addict. I could not grasp the tragedy of this at first. I was as ignorant of the drug habit as I had been of other vital truths. The subject was little discussed in those days, for drug users were not common. I only knew here was a chance to prove my love for my husband. I would help him get rid of the curse.

How much easier said than done! I did not realize it then, so I went home rejoicing that the mystery of my husband's changed attitude was solved; that at last I could be of real service to him.

Fortunately I found him his old bright self when I returned, so it was easy to put my arms around his neck and say:

"I have discovered what is wrong, dear. I do not reproach you. I know that in some way, perhaps not your fault, you have formed this terrible habit. I am only happy to have a chance to prove what your love means to me. We are going to fight this thing out together, you and I. Then, when we have won, we are going to be happier than ever. At least I will be, for then I will have canceled part of my debt to you."

My sincerity touched him deeply, for he broke down and told me how this monster had fastened on him years ago, through having morphine prescribed for sickness. Only re-

cently the craving had gained mastery when he began increasing the dose. He was now taking it in alarming quantities, but with my help he would give it up.

"I need you now, honey," he cried, clinging to me. "Don't give me up. I'll fight this thing to a finish, if you'll only stick."

"I'll stick, boy," I said, soothing him, and I stuck. Had I been able to foresee the years of heartache, sorrow, hopelessness and degradation that this promise would entail, I doubt if I could have made it so courageously.

I will not go into the details of the years that followed. The horrors of the drug habit do not make pleasant reading. Cure followed cure, without permanent results. When big, strong characters fall, it seems they fall so far. For a time after each cure, Will would make an attempt to reëstablish himself in business, only to again succumb to the drug habit.

I soon realized that I would have to assume the responsibility as head of the family. This I was glad to be able to do, for the sake of my poor boy and little Helen, now a student at school. I knew Will would soon be himself again. How that hope has buoyed me up through the long years! I took up office work once more and in a short time was holding a very good position with a real estate company. The higher I climbed in business, the lower sank my husband. At times he was utterly irresponsible, incapable of any kind of work. How he got drugs, I never knew. I watched him as closely as possible, guarded him like a child, but always, always after each so-called cure, he managed through peddlers, or other addicts, to get the deadly stuff. Each time he became more insensible to the manhood that was slipping from him, more indifferent to his obligations, more unconcerned as to my love, more vicious toward my beautiful daughter, for whom he had once felt a strong affection.

At first I considered it a privilege to look after my helpless husband. He was mine and I loved him. He had done much for me—I would do much for him. Always I visioned him again taking his place in the world, a magnetic, forceful man, possessed of every noble trait, as I knew him until this drug octopus fastened itself on him. But as years passed and his periods of normalcy grew further and further apart, as the soul-destroying power of the drug made him cruel, cunning and bestial, I lost hope for his ultimate recovery. I accepted his deplorable condition as the cross I had to bear.

My pride, however, aroused that day so long ago, did not desert me. I determined that neither my daughter nor myself should be dragged down by drugs, even though my husband was helpless in the clutches of our country's greatest curse. I began selling real estate, for I needed money desperately. Yearly cures, nurses and sanitariums were expensive, but how glad I was to be able to supply them. By rigid economy, I was able to build a modest little home, where I kept Will when he was not entirely unmanageable.

I have gained a certain standing in the city where I live, for my business has made me more or less prominent in civic and club activities. None but my intimate friends know I have a husband. He is rarely in condition to be seen, and now never a husband to arouse pride. For his sake, I have deprived myself of the comforting presence of my daughter, for the sight of her, the innocent cause of much of my misery, arouses the demon within him. I see her only at those times, unknown to Will, when I can visit her at her boarding school. Helen, remembering him as a once loving father, at times is overcome with compassion, at other times with disgust. Then she pleads for me to divorce him. He has become abusive and low, with utter contempt for the finer things of life. Seldom does he show even a glimpse of his once fine character. At times, when

his eyes gleam at me and he makes vile threats, I am afraid of him. My friends, even his relatives, beg me to leave him for my own safety, but I cannot. When I mention such a thing, as I occasionally do, hoping to reawaken his moral stamina, a sneer comes over his drug-pallid face. The pupils of his once wonderful eyes, now contracted to pin points, become even smaller when he says:

"You'll never divorce me, old girl, and mighty well you know it. You don't dare file a suit charging me with being a dope fiend. The counter-suit I'd bring would make interesting reading for your hoity-toity friends. Now that you're up in the world, don't forget that I found you in the street. You want to swap your snowbird husband for someone else, eh? Who'd want you, if they knew what I know?"

Then he laughs a cunning laugh, more cruel than the bitterest cursing—a laugh that deadens the heart within me, that surges me with pity, not for myself, but for him, once God's noblest specimen, now so drug saturated that every ounce of manhood has been crowded out.

My story is finished. I'll never divorce my husband. Even if I could, without disgrace to myself and my child, my duty is to him. He needs me. He is one of God's unfortunates.

XV

The Storm in the Heart

IT WAS during my senior year at college that I met Fern Forrest. She was just seventeen; a tiny girl, not quite five feet. Eyes as dark as a hidden pool in a forest, hair the color of autumn leaves.

Her dainty beauty made me acutely conscious of my own ugliness. Nose out of joint, a lip that had been split and sewed—both effects of a bitterly contested football game in my freshman year—sandy colored hair, large hands and feet.

I began to compare my looks with my brother Tom, who was twenty-two, three years my senior, and and was a teacher of Math in the college. Tom was tall, handsome and agreeable, always popular among the girls. They all adored him.

My surprise was great when Fern showed her preference for me. I was surprised, humbled, exalted, for I had given her my heart at our first meeting.

Two months before commencement I learned she cared for me. I was so happy that I rushed to Tom with the news. When I saw the look on his face I realized that he was in love with Fern too, and I pitied him and wondered at my luck.

That night there came a telegram from my mother. I must come home at once as my father was seriously ill, and they needed me.

Now my parents lived in a little country village, three miles from the depot. Our farm was large and our neighbors scattered, none nearer than a mile. My father kept

the village store and we were looked up to in the community.

It was late in April and I knew there would be much to do on the farm besides the work of the store. Of course I must go, even if it meant I couldn't graduate that term. Tom had always hated farm work and he couldn't leave his teaching.

I didn't have time before the train came to see Fern, but I left her a little note with Tom.

My father's recovery was very slow and the work at home kept me busy. I wrote to Fern nearly every day for the first month; then, hurt because she had not written me one line, I quit; planning that as soon as school was over, Tom home, I would run down to see her.

Tom wrote a few letters in those two months, but never mentioned Fern.

A week after graduation I heard the honk of Tom's car in front of the house. I was busy in the back of the store filling an oil can for a customer. Hastily I washed my hands and rushed out to the lane. My heart skipped several beats, for there in the car beside Tom sat Fern!

My happiness was short lived, however, for as I drew near the car Tom was saying, "Mother, this is my wife, Fern."

Everything seemed to turn black around me. What could it mean? Fern, *my Fern,* his wife? Had she merely been flirting with me or had my brother in some way cheated me? I would find out, but in the meantime neither should know how I was hurt.

A few days later while tramping through the woods trying to make up my mind what to do with myself, for life seemed useless, I saw Fern. She was seated on a dead, uprooted tree and looked altogether miserable. I could see she had been crying.

I sat down beside her and asked her in as casual tone as I could muster what the trouble was.

Then she told me why she had married Tom. She was hurt because I had gone away without a word of explanation, had waited in vain for a letter from me and when she had questioned Tom he had laughed at the idea of my caring for her, had hinted that there was a girl at home whom I loved. I wouldn't have thought that Tom would have done such a thing. He had got my letters to her, kept them. So, in a fit of pique, she had married him and had regretted it the moment it was too late; was bitterly unhappy.

I explained; but what good were explanations now? She was my brother's wife and though we loved each other dearly there was nothing to be done. He had tricked her into marriage, but she had done wrong to marry him when her heart belonged to me. We must both pay.

The next day I enlisted in the war. I hoped to be sent into immediate action; courted death; yet I went through the whole four years of hell of it with barely a scratch.

When I came back I was hardened, bitter, and believed I had gotten over my love for Fern. I hoped she had learned to love Tom. There had been a few letters from Mother and Dad, so I knew that Fern had a three-year-old son, knew that Tom was still teaching at —— College and that they spent all of their vacations at home as Fern had no relatives.

It was January when I reached home. Tom had just gone back to college after the Christmas holidays and to my surprise I learned that Fern was teaching in the little village school.

At four o'clock I walked the half mile to the schoolhouse to meet her. Somehow I wanted to meet her alone to make sure it was all over between us.

She was dressed in a short brown skirt, bright red sweater and tam. The misty rain had curled her hair about her face. To me she was the loveliest, most vivid woman I had ever seen. The love I had thought dead flamed afresh

in my heart. Yet carefully I hid it. She must not know.

Fern dropped the hand of her little son, Don, and ran to me, crying in a queer, choking sort of way: "Ted! Ted! Back at last and safe! I've prayed for your safety daily, Ted."

Her eyes were misty. I saw the four years were as nothing; she still cared. Then I must go away again.

At the supper table I broached the subject of going away to work. I saw the light die out of Fern's eyes, saw the hurt, bewildered look in my mother's face. My father turned to me. "My son," he said, "we gladly gave you when our country needed you, but now it is we who need you. Would you desert us?"

What could I do? I stayed and tried with all my power never to be alone with Fern, never to let her know how dear she was to me. It was hard, very hard. The things I had gone through "over there" were as nothing compared to it.

Perhaps every community has one woman like my mother. Surely none quite as good as she. Always she had been loved by the villagers. It was "Go to Mrs. Holt if you're in trouble," or "Send for Mrs. Holt," when someone was sick. Mother's deeds of kindness were numerous. She never failed to respond when called upon.

One morning near the end of February my father had to go to the city to attend to some urgent business. It was bitterly cold and threatening snow as I drove him the three miles to the station.

"If it snows or turns any colder by night, don't meet me. I'll stay over in town until morning," he said.

After midday it began to snow furiously and a bitter wind howled around the house.

Fern came in at dusk, radiant and rosy from her brisk tramp through the snow and wind.

As she stood warming her hands at the big fire I looked down at her, wishing I could take her in my arms, kiss the

little cold hands until they were warm; crush the vivid scarlet of her lips against my own.

We were alone in the room except for old Marta, a second cousin of Mother's, who was a poor simple creature and had been since birth. She rarely spoke and had the intellect of a child. I had got in the habit of treating Marta as though she were as inanimate as a piece of furniture.

As I stood there at one side of the fireplace looking down at Fern with my heart in my eyes, she looked up suddenly. Hastily I looked away, but it was too late. Fern had seen. She gave a little gasp and flung out her hands in a queer groping gesture, then turned and fled up the stairs without one backward look.

As I watched her I was startled by Marta's laughter. It was shrill, and made my flesh creep. I looked at her. What had she seen that called for laughter? She couldn't have understood what had happened between Fern and me. I dismissed Marta from my thoughts, as was my custom.

Fern did not look at me during supper. I noticed her eyes were bright, feverish, her face flushed.

A little after the dishes were washed, she carried Don off to bed and said she was going to bed also, as she had a headache.

At eleven o'clock I was roused by a knocking at the front door. Putting a bathrobe over my pajamas, I ran down. Mother, whose bedroom was downstairs, was already at the door.

It was one of the neighbors wanting Mother to come to his wife at once as she was critically ill and old Doc Kelly had said, "We need Mrs. Holt."

The wind was blowing a gale and I hated to see her go out, but the neighbor had a good sleigh, a fast team of mules, and I knew Mother would go despite any protests of mine. So I saw that she was well wrapped and went back upstairs.

Evidently old Marta, whose room was at the head of the stairs, had not heard the commotion. A streak of light shone from under Fern's door, across the hall from mine. I paused a moment beside her door, debating whether I should tell her about Mother, then I heard her voice, tender, soothing, saying something to little Don. I walked away. The thought that was always with me was intensified at that moment. If it had not been for my brother's perfidy I would not be standing outside Fern's door. Her sweet voice would be crooning a melody to *our* son.

I could not go back to sleep. The storm was increasing, but it was nothing to the storm going on in my heart. Now that Fern knew I still loved her, what did she think? What would she do? Would she stay on or give up her little school and go back to Tom? She had only taken the school because the Board could get no teacher, Mother had told me. But I wondered if this was the only reason. She did not love Tom, was not happy with him, and had taken the school, I believe, so as to be able to remain away from him.

For over an hour I lay there, wide-eyed, tortured by my thoughts. Suddenly the door opened and Fern came in the room, closing the door behind her.

Before lying down, I had put a big piece of wood on my fire and now the room was dimly lit. Amazed, I sat up in bed and stared at her, drinking in the beauty of her in a soft, woolly robe of pink over a lace-trimmed nightdress. Her little feet were incased in rose felt slippers. The tumbled brown hair gave her the look of a little child, but her eyes were brilliant as she came toward me.

"What is it, Fern?" I asked, trying to make my voice casual. "Is something wrong with little Don?"

"No, nothing is wrong with Don, Ted, but—everything is wrong with me."

Then to my dismay she sank down on the floor beside my bed, burying her face in the covers, and burst into tears.

I pulled her up from the cold, bare floor and held her shivering body close to mine and said: "Now tell me all about it, dear. You know I'm really your—big brother and you should come to me with your troubles."

That was the rôle I would play. It was safe, but God alone knew how hard it was.

"Brother?" she echoed. "No, Ted, no! Tell me what I saw in your face to-night was true. You love me? You have not forgotten?"

I tried to lie. I couldn't. She was there in my arms, after all the years I had longed for her. But I stared at the fire and not at her face as I told her!

"Yes, Fern, it is true. I have not forgotten. I love you, and——"

She moved a little in my embrace, then took one hand and turned my head. "Look at me, Ted," she whispered.

Resolutely I sought to release her, to look away, but with a little cry she slipped both arms around my neck, raised her lips to mine.

Did she know what that kiss would do? Often I have wondered, for she had been Tom's wife for four years and men are pretty much alike. Adam was the first man to lay the blame on woman.

Yet I could not be happy. The thing lay like a stone upon my heart. "Your brother's wife! Your brother's wife!" conscience goaded me. I begged Fern to go to Tom, but she would not listen to me. She loved me so, hated Tom, and could not see the rottenness as I did, and by some perversity of human nature this very trait of Fern's killed my love for her. It didn't die at once, but by slow degrees. I came to learn many little things about her character.

Love is a curious thing. Respect must go hand in hand with love, or love dies. If only Fern could have remembered that! But I have said I would not follow Adam's example.

My love waned. I hated myself; at times I hated her.

"You don't love me any more," she protested one day.

"It isn't that, Fern," I lied. "Can't you see that this madness can't go on? Soon Tom will be here. What then?"

"We will go away together, Ted, before he comes. Just you and I."

"What about Don?" I asked, amazed at her plan.

"Mother Holt will care for him. She idolizes him. We will be so happy, Ted."

"Fern," I remonstrated, "wouldn't it be better to explain to Tom that we love each other, ask him to divorce you, so we could marry?"

"I have already asked Tom that. Asked him the day you left to enlist. He swore that nothing I could do or say would make him divorce me. He would say the same thing now."

I thought of my father, who needed me badly at home. I knew that Tom, who hated everything else but teaching, would never take my place on the farm. Could I leave as Fern was begging me? Could we two be happy after throwing all our responsibilities aside? I told myself no. I pictured the heartache such a thing would bring to my parents. My mother, used to being looked up to, used to being the most loved woman in the community, would be heartbroken. I could not agree to Fern's plan.

So the days passed, with arguments from me and pleas and wheedling from Fern, until the day of my brother's home-coming.

It was a lovely morning in May and because I dreaded the meeting with my brother I decided to plow the corn in the field farthest from the house.

I had been there two hours when I heard the horn blow, three short, imperative calls. It was a signal rarely heard, reserved for fire or accident. I left my team and ran to the house.

On a couch in the living room lay Fern, white as death, moaning a little. Father was at the phone, trying to get Mother, who had gone to dress the burns of a neighbor's child. Tom was bending over Fern.

Panting, I leaned against the door casing, for I had run every step of the way. "What is wrong with Fern?" I gasped.

My brother turned, and at the sight of his face I knew he suspected something. "Yes, what is wrong with Fern? That is what I want to know? She has taken poison—on the day I come home after an absence of five months. Why?"

I could only stare at him. Fern would not have done that, try to kill herself! Outside I heard the doctor's flivver stop.

"Well, are you going to answer me or must I make you?" my brother asked.

Before I could frame a reply there came a shrill cackle of laughter from old Marta, who sat huddled on the stair steps.

"Yes, Ted, answer Tom. Tell him how things are between you and Fern." Again that terrible laugh.

So, Marta had understood more than we had thought! She wasn't the inanimate piece of furniture we had all believed her.

"Is this thing true? Do you love—" Tom demanded, his face as white as Fern's.

All the pent-up hate that had festered in my heart against him for years suddenly burst. "Yes, it is true!" I told him. "You lied to her, kept my letters from her, stole her from me, and now—well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Kill you and then kill her!" Tom said, and made for me. Old Doc Kelly stepped in between us. "This is not the time or place to settle that. Fern may be dying and—look at your father, boys!"

Father had slumped down in his chair as though dead.

Under Doc Kelly's orders we worked like mad for the next half-hour. Fern rallied, but lay with her face to the wall and would not speak or look at anyone.

My father lay on his bed in the adjoining room, the victim of a stroke of apoplexy. Doc Kelly had managed to reach my mother by phone and told her to come home at once. Just a few moments before we heard the wagon bringing Mother, Father opened his eyes. He looked at me.

"Ted," he said in a voice that hurt me as I've never been hurt in all my life, "I had rather you had been killed in France than this. Your brother's wife, and under my own roof! A child like Fern. May God forgive you. I cannot." He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again and said: "Your mother must never know. Promise me that you will stay here to take care of her, Ted, and that never again will you forget that Fern is your—sister."

Tears in my eyes, I promised. Then my father turned to Tom. "You, my son, will promise that your mother will never know. Fern is such a child and you took her knowing she loved Ted. Remember that. And as long as your mother lives, continue to come home for the vacations, so that she will never suspect."

It must have cost Tom something to make that promise.

There was no need to exact a promise from Doc Kelly. He was our friend. No one thought of Marta.

Mother came running in and a few moments later my father died in her arms.

Doc Kelly explained that Fern had taken the strychnine tablets through mistake and that the shock of her condition had brought on Father's stroke, and Mother in her great grief never questioned.

How can I describe the torment of my mind and soul in those days? I held myself responsible for my father's death, for my mother's heartbreak. Fern's white, tortured face

was almost more than I could endure. My heart ached with pity for her. The great love I had held for her was gone; yet I still loved her enough to pity her, to wonder if perhaps she would not have been better off if the poison had killed her.

I don't think I shall ever forget the agony of that summer. I never spoke to Fern or Tom except in Mother's presence. I worked as I had never worked before. When they left for Tom's college, I felt a little better. At least I would not have Fern's reproachful face before me.

It was always the custom for the school-teachers to board with us, as we lived nearest the school and had a large house. So I was not surprised when Lynn Robinson came to stay with us about the middle of September.

She was tall, nearly as tall as my six feet. Her hair was a golden bronze, her eyes the purple blue of pansies. You knew just to look at her that she was gentle, brave, and loyal.

At first I avoided her, but when my mother accused me of churlishness I began to stay downstairs after supper was over. Sometimes we played cards; sometimes Lynn, seated at the old organ, would sing in a sweet contralto voice. We discussed books, science, many things; and daily I was amazed at the wealth of learning stored up in Lynn's lovely head. What a woman she was! What a wife she would make for some man! She had brains as well as beauty and appealed to the very best that was in me.

Often I contrasted Lynn with Fern and wondered why I had ever loved Fern.

About the middle of November old Marta died. As she had always been more or less of a trial, we could not mourn her passing.

One day, a week before Christmas, Lynn asked me to help her get a Christmas tree for the school. We found one near by and after chopping it down I dragged it to the school

and put it up for the children to decorate. They buzzed about the tree and Lynn in happy excitement. It was easy to see that they adored "teacher," and I didn't wonder. I was adoring her myself in an humble way, quite as a page might adore a princess in a tower with no hope for anything better than to be allowed to stand at the foot of the tower and adore.

Helping with the decorations—we were putting holly sprays about the walls—our hands touched. I saw her eyes change, saw the crimson spread over her face.

Forgetting everything but what I had read in her eyes, I took the hand that was reaching up to me with the holly, held it one moment and whispered, "Lynn! Lynn, dear!"

Then realization came back to me. I let her hand fall, got down off the ladder, and bolted.

After supper I went straight to my room and fought a battle with myself as I paced up and down. Had I a right to offer Lynn love and marriage? I believed she cared; but would she after she knew about Fern? I felt she would hate me, even as I hated myself.

I always breakfasted before Lynn came down, so I did not see her that morning. She was late coming home in the evening and Mother worried a little. I knew that she was quite fond of Lynn, knew that although she had said no word, she was hoping that we might love each other.

Mother was busy in the kitchen and did not hear Lynn when she finally came. I looked up from my reading and at the sight of Lynn's white face I dropped the paper and went to her.

She was trembling and steadied herself against the door, holding me back with a gesture.

"Ted," she asked in a queer, choky sort of voice, "I have been at Miss Fannie Peele's. She—she told me—some—things about—about you and—your brother's wife. Are they—true?"

The pain in the pansy-blue eyes wrung my heart. I saw it was taking all her will power to keep her voice steady.

"I did not know that Miss Fannie knew anything," I said wearily, "but I suppose what she told you is true."

"Suppose?" Scorn in her lovely voice now, scorn to cover the hurt in her heart, I knew. "Aren't you at least man enough to admit it outright? Ted! Ted!"

"I wasn't trying to deny or evade, Lynn. It is only that I was a bit bewildered that Miss Fannie should know. I don't want Mother to know. I promised my father that she shouldn't."

"It seems that old Marta told several people and they in turn told others. Your mother and—I—were the only ones in ignorance. But you need not worry about your mother. Everyone loves her; no one would hurt her. Oh, why didn't you go away? The things they say——"

"Lynn, why did Miss Fannie tell you?" I was amazed, appalled that the whole community should know about the affair, but the thing that was uppermost in my thoughts then was that Lynn could never know but one side; could never forgive. It was up to me, then, to make her think that I was utterly beneath her forgiveness, utterly base. If she could hate me, things would be easier for her.

"Miss Fannie told me because she considered it her duty when she learned that—that I—I cared for you and believed you cared." She choked back a sob. "Oh, I don't want ever to see you again! I can't understand how you could! Your brother's wife!" She ran up the stairs, shaking with sobs, the tears streaming down her face. And I, aching to take her in my arms, miserable because I had brought pain to her, could only stare after her.

I marveled at her composure when later, at Mother's call, she came down and made a pretense at eating.

"Mrs. Holt," she said after a while, "I had a letter from my mother to-day. She isn't so well and I am going home

for Christmas, after all. Do you think the Board could find someone to take my place when school reopens? I don't expect to come back."

I had gone for the mail that day and knew that there had been no letter from Lynn's home town. Of course it was best for her to go. It would be intolerable for both of us if she stayed on. Yet how could I let her go out of my life, never to see her again?

Mother was almost in tears and protested against Lynn's going. Then seeing that she was determined, she began to consider whom the Board could get to finish out the term. When mother suggested that perhaps Fern might be persuaded to take the school, I got up abruptly and went outside.

It was cold, bitterly cold and clear. The stars seemed very near and close. I walked on down to the river and stood on the bridge looking at the black, rushing waters. That would be an easy way out, but there was Mother. She needed me.

For the first time in years I prayed. "Oh, Lord, I don't mind paying for my sins, for I know I can never atone, but must Lynn pay, too? Is it part of my punishment to know that innocently I have caused her pain? Isn't there some way out?" But I knew there was no way. Perhaps if Fern could have talked to Lynn—but no, Fern would resent Lynn if she knew. If only Lynn could have forgiven!

The next morning it was my duty to drive Lynn to the station, as the hired man had gone home for the holidays and there was no one else.

Neither of us spoke until we were near the depot. Then Lynn said: "Ted, I'm sorry. Sorry for both of us, but—no woman could forgive. And there is the fact that your brother and—his wife spend their vacations at your home, will be there to-morrow. It—it is intolerable, unthinkable."

"Yes," I answered. "It is intolerable, unthinkable and

worse than that, but it must be borne. We promised my father that my mother must never know. She is fond of Fern and worships little Don. I think my father knew that the situation would be unbearable, meant it as punishment for the three of us."

"The three?" Lynn repeated, looking at me curiously. "What three?"

"Fern, myself, and Tom."

"Why should your brother be punished?"

I stared at her in surprise. "I thought you knew that Fern was engaged to me, and my brother, through lies and keeping my letters from her, took her from me."

"No," she said slowly. "Gossip hadn't heard of it."

"Well, it doesn't make much difference," I said wearily, as we drove up to the steps of the depot. I helped her down from the wagon, then took out her trunks and bags. When I had finished having them checked the train was in.

Lynn gave me her hand in parting. I could see that she was on the verge of tears. I was dumb with misery. I wanted to grab her up, take her back to the wagon, back home, and there tell her the whole story, make her forgive. She had said, "No woman could forgive." I let her go.

That was over a year ago and I have not heard a thing from Lynn. Sometimes the wish to see her is unbearable, but life goes on. Mother has been dead for five months. A sister of Father's keeps house for me, tries to take Mother's place, but that is impossible.

Tom sold his share of the farm and store to me. He and Fern will never come back. Fern wrote me that she had forgiven me. Forgiven *me?* No one but God and myself can know the irony of that! She wrote that Tom was very good to her and that she was happy and hoped some day that I might find happiness, too. Perhaps she thought the letter would help. Instead, it only added to the wretchedness of things.

We have a new school, well ventilated, and with good heating arrangements. Our roads are better kept; old crippled George Perry has a wheel chair; overworked Emma Payne, who had to carry water a quarter of a mile, has a pump in her kitchen. Things like this have helped me. Once I overheard someone remark, "Ted Howell must not be such a bad sort after all. I'm always running across some little thing he has done for someone." "Humph!" the listener retorted. "Guess it is just a sop to his conscience."

Was he right? Is it just "a sop to my conscience?" I don't know. I like doing these things for people. It is the only happiness I know, and when it is at all possible I never let "my right hand know."

I am writing this because my most loyal friend, one who has stood by me, believed in me, prayed for me, has asked me for the true story of it all, and—then, there is the hope that Lynn will see these pages and understand and forgive. I have paid, surely, for my sin. Paid in suffering, remorse, and in losing those I loved. Downstairs, as I write, old Aunt Kate is singing in a thin, quavering voice a popular song that we heard over the radio the other night. Her voice comes up plainly to me—"It is human to err, but divine to forgive; take me back, take me back to your heart."

Oh, Lynn, Lynn, won't you forgive?

XVI

Heart's Desire

I'M WRITING this story as a message to all discouraged little Cinderellas, because sometimes in real life comes the Fairy Prince, and sometimes we get our heart's desire. So, Cinderellas, dry your tears and square your shoulders. Perhaps your Fairy Prince will soon come too! Never give up hoping!

My mother, who came from Andalusia in Spain, died several years ago. My father was an Englishman who had gone through two fortunes, partly through unwise speculations and partly through reckless and lavish entertainment. Money just melted in his hands. His relatives in England, very conventional and conservative people, had washed their hands of him, after they had repeatedly helped him out of various scrapes and difficulties. And so, when I was fifteen, we decided to go to a new country and settled in Canada.

After my mother's death, I told my father that I wanted to go out and earn my own living. He was very much adverse to this. "No woman in our family has ever worked for her living," etc., etc. But I was firm. I studied stenography, because although a fairly good pianist and elocutionist, I was no genius, and I thought it better to take up some kind of work that would bring me in a steady salary.

My father had a longing to return to England soon after I had begun to work, so I was left alone.

One day, through a lawyer friend of my father's, I heard of an opening for a private secretary in New York. I have always been of an adventurous nature, so I called long distance, secured the position and left two days later.

My new employer was a retired college professor who had since become prominent in world peace plans and political movements. He was a delightful, sage old gentleman with a wonderful mind and a keen sense of humor. Our liking for each other was mutual, and I owe him more than I can say. So many wonderful, good books that I did not know the existence of he made me acquainted with, and in so many little acts of kindness and thoughtfulness did the old professor show what a Santa Claus kind of person he was.

One day, two students from the University came into the office. They were Mexicans and friends of the professor's. As he was out, they decided they would wait for a few minutes, so we sat and talked. They were delightful, well-bred young men with that dark beauty that I have always found most attractive, an inheritance perhaps, from my Spanish mother. Blond men don't appeal to me at all.

Before they left, Miguel Mendoza, the older and taller of the two, invited me to go and dance with him and I accepted, with my employer's approval. Thus began some wonderfully good times for me.

A few months later, the professor left for a long sojourn in Europe, but before he went he obtained a position for me as secretary to a political organization, the leaders of which were rich society women. He thought, of course, that he was doing me a kindness, but oh, how I had to work! I not only had to answer the telephone every few minutes, and be an encyclopedia of information, but I was unofficially the reception committee and had to weed out undesirable callers, and then I was at the beck and call of eight imperious women who must have everything done at just that moment, and they all had more temperament (no, temper is more correct) than the proverbial prima donna. How my arm ached at the end of the day from so many hours of short-hand, and I never could completely catch up with my work. I used to come home after the terrible jam in the subway

more dead than alive. By "home" I mean my room in the average New York rooming house.

Sometimes, I used to get desperately lonely and blue, because, like every other girl I wanted lots of pretty clothes to wear when I went out with Miguel, and, of course, on my salary, it was impossible to have more than one "fluffy" dress.

I became more and more fond of Miguel. I thought that he would also feel the same, and later want to marry me, and thus my future would be settled. But one evening, when he kissed me good night, he sat down again on the hall seat and said he wanted to talk to me. I wondered what was coming, because he had seemed preoccupied all evening.

"You know," he began, "I care for you more than any girl in the world, except my sister, but many times I have thought I should have explained my position better. I have no right to make you care for me more all the time, because I can't offer to marry you."

The last words were a terrible blow to me; my heart seemed to be beating like a sledge hammer. I wondered if he could hear it. I had begun to care so much, indeed. Was my poor little castle in Spain to dissolve into thin air?

He went on: "Since my mother's death, I have been everything in the world to my father, because my sister is married and lives in Spain now. My father made me promise not to marry until I am thirty, and the girl he has picked for me is the daughter of a very rich and influential man who is an old friend of his. So you see, my life is mapped out for me. If I took other steps, my father would be bitterly disappointed in me, and I would not for the world cause him any grief or pain.

"Another thing, although I am twenty-five years old, I have always received my allowance from Father. After graduating, I have taken a postgraduate course to please

him. This means, that so far, I have been entirely dependent on my father. I haven't one cent of my own, and I wouldn't ask any girl to marry me and keep on working. My pride would not let me, and—" he hesitated.

I had listened with simulated calmness, and I said steadily. "Please be frank with me, Miguel. If there is another reason why you can't marry me, tell me."

"I don't want to hurt you, Viola."

"Tell me," I insisted. "I must know."

"Viola, *guerida,* if I loved you with all my soul, so tremendously and so completely that nothing else in the world mattered, I suppose I would forget everything and make you mine. But although you are very dear to me, I cannot do that, because I do not love enough."

For a moment, although I appreciated his frankness, all my wounded love and pride leaped to the surface. I would never see him again. I would dismiss him now and forever. Then visions of lonely evenings in my room came to me. Don't be too hard on me for not being more independent and saying good-by then and there. New York is the most lonesome place in the world. So I answered:

"I understand, Miguel, and I appreciate your frankness. But let's be friends and see each other once in a while, anyhow."

He took my hand and kissed it with a graceful gesture.

"For this gift of friendship I thank you, Viola, and it shall be as you say."

Of course, I cried all night and many nights after, but I hugged my misery to myself. Nobody knew. He didn't care enough! He didn't care enough! Ah, how that hurt!

One evening a few weeks later, Miguel, some other boy and girl friends and myself, went to Greenwich Village to dance. We went to the Pirate's Den, as had been decided by Miguel the day before. Everything was in full swing when we arrived. The parrots were squawking, the orches-

tra was jazzing, the "pirates" were staging a mock fight with blunt cutlasses, the flappers were flapping, and the dim, candlelit "den" was blue with smoke.

After we had given the waiter our order, we sat and looked things over for a while before we danced. A few minutes later, my girl friend Marie nudged me excitedly. "Viola, oh look! Is that Valentino?"

I turned my head to see. He certainly was a handsome fellow, and though he wasn't Valentino, I wasn't so sure but that he had the famous star beaten for looks. To my surprise he smiled, bowed, and sat down at the table with us. Miguel was plainly displeased. I expected him to ask the stranger to leave, but it appeared they were friends and classmates. Miguel, somewhat loathe, introduced him to us.

He asked me for the next dance, turning to Miguel for permission. As we danced, he said:

"Do you know that I was determined to meet you to-night?"

I shook my head. "How can that be possible when you don't know me?" I replied.

"But yes," he answered. "For nearly a year Miguel has spoken of you in his letters, and I have wanted to meet you so much. Yesterday, he told me you were all coming here to-night, and so I came also. I want to tell you, oh, so many things, but I cannot because I am Miguel's friend. But please promise me, if you ever stop going around with Miguel to let me know."

I laughingly promised. This man had a compelling personality that made people do as he wished. The other two girls raved about him, and were quite envious of the impression I seemed to have made. The next two evenings he joined our party, and I was glad. It distracted my mind a little from Miguel.

Ramon Zaldivar, as I will call him now, was a Cuban.

His family was both aristocratic and wealthy. He told me he expected to return to Cuba in another year. He was taking a postgraduate course at Yale and only came to New York occasionally.

Well, the weeks went on, and gradually I got to know a few more people. Then I made a decision that I would see Miguel for the last time. Every time I saw him, it hurt and I determined to end it. So one night after the theater I told him that although I had nothing against him and would always hope and wish for his happiness, I thought it wiser not to keep on seeing each other when it could lead to nothing.

For a few minutes he tried to make me alter my decision. Then, seeing I was firm, he kissed me good-by with tears in his eyes and murmured brokenly that he hoped I would some day have the happiness I deserved. I have never seen him since.

I started going out a great deal after this, but I never got reckless. Sometimes I would wonder if I had had the background of my wealthy relatives, a charming home, and no office grind, whether it would have made any difference to Miguel. But I decided no.

Nearly a year passed.

One night I was at home, as I had been, for a few nights, and felt lonesome. I sat thinking of some of the good times we had had, and I thought again of Ramon. I had thought of him many times, of his arresting personality, but to-night his memory seemed more insistent than usual. Suppose I did as he had asked me to that night, wrote him a little note asking how he was, and telling him that I had not seen Miguel for almost a year?

It seemed a daring thing to do, and I reflected, to myself: "You conceited little idiot! He has probably forgotten you long ago. No doubt he has plenty of rich girl friends with wonderful homes and clothes. Why should he think of you?"

Yet, as my prudent self scolded, my adventurous self, which I am afraid is usually the strongest, laughed, wrote the note and mailed it before prudence could get in another word!

By return mail came the answer from Prince Charming. It was a delightful letter, not too gushing, but he was so glad to hear from me. He enclosed some snapshots of himself. "In case you have forgotten me, and won't recognize me when you see me. Please be sweet enough to send me one of yourself."

And so a wonderful friendship began by correspondence. At first, I thought Ramon had been so vivid in my memory because of his good looks, but I learned there were many things of solid worth in his character from his letters, and I realized that the attraction was much more than merely physical. He told me that the first chance he had, he was coming to New York for a visit.

Miguel and the other fellows had given me several warnings about Ramon. They said he was typical Don Juan, a heartbreaker, who cared for nobody but himself. Later, I realized that these warnings were prompted by jealousy.

He wrote such interesting letters. I never failed to receive them, two and three times a week. And so, on the days when I was blue, I could always depend on Ramon's letters reaching me soon and cheering me up. He found out that I was very fond of music and poetry, so sometimes a piece of music would arrive, or a book of poems.

Five months after our correspondence had begun, I was getting very restless. My health was never good in the winter; I was continually taking cold and getting aches and pains all over, and I dreamed of tropical countries, blue skies, perpetual sunshine. I hated the thought of the coming winter. Finally, I wrote to agencies in Havana, asking particulars of secretarial and stenographic work. They had my name on file.

One Tuesday I received a letter from Ramon. He said he would be in New York on the following Saturday. He was coming straight to my house, and would we have one good time! Well! And he had many things to say to me. He had learned to care for me through my letters. Could I reciprocate? You can guess my excitement when I read this.

When I returned in the evening, there was a cable from Havana awaiting me. It read: "Position assured. Sail Friday without fail."

Sail Friday? That would mean that I would miss seeing Ramon. I sat down on the bed to think it out.

He had told me he was going home in October. It was now the end of August. With Miguel, perhaps, I had been overanxious in the beginning. I determined I would not be so with Ramon. A few weeks will not make any difference, I said to myself. I am so anxious to see another country. If I miss this chance of spending the winter in the tropics, I may never have another. If he really cares, he will only be more eager to see me again.

So I wrote a very sweet note to Ramon and told him of my plans. As to my feelings toward him, I was noncommittal. I said I would be among the first to welcome him home.

The voyage was delightful. I was so tired from my strenuous work in New York that it was heavenly to rest.

The weeks went by. I applied myself diligently to mastering Spanish. As I have a natural love of everything Spanish, it came easily to me. I was making more money than I had received in New York, so I was able to buy myself some dainty, cobwebby dresses, in pastel shades, and some picturesque hats of georgette and tulle, such as the feminine population wear in Cuba. Everything was new and strange, and how I enjoyed it!

I liked my new position very much. I was secretary to

the president of a large mercantile firm, an elderly gentleman of culture and travel, and his knowledge of English was excellent. We got along famously.

Some of the American and English girls in the office used to go for long rides on horseback on Saturday afternoons, and they invited me to join them. They took bathing suits, and sometimes when we rode to Santa Fé, we would have a glorious swim. I had never had much outdoor exercise before, and it enchanted me.

My letters arrived faithfully as usual. Ramon said he was heartbroken because our meeting was postponed, but he intended to make up for it.

At last the day came for Ramon to arrive. Needless to say, I didn't get much sleep the night before. I arranged for a girl friend to go down to the dock with me.

Ramon was the first to land. With a glad, happy look on his face, he seized my hands. "Viola, at last!" He turned to introduced me to a stately, Cuban lady in black, his mother, who acknowledged the introduction graciously. It was arranged that he should call on me in the evening.

Cinderella, dressing for the ball, was not more happy or excited than I was that night. I put on my new green georgette in a jade tone which went well with my coloring, hair, dark copper, eyebrows and eyelashes very black, eyes so dark a violet they look black. I am slight and of medium height. I tucked some "mariposas" (butterflies) in my hair, just under my ear. Of all Cuban flowers, I love the mariposa the best. It is pure white, a little larger than a jasmine flower, and its perfume is exquisite.

We spent a wonderfully happy evening, the forerunner of many more to come. In a few days, we acknowledged our mutual love, and Ramon asked me to be his wife. He cared enough! At last, here was the real Fairy Prince! I gladly consented.

How thankful I was that while I lived in New York

I had turned down invitations to wild parties, and just kept to my own few friends. We had had good times, but never any fun we had need to be ashamed of. No matter how blue or lonely I had felt, I always thought something good was in store for me. I had, too, a good opinion of myself. The right kind of self-esteem is necessary to success. I knew I was good looking, with a fair amount of education and travel. I came from a good family, and although at that time I was only a stenographer, yet, if I bided my time, the Fairy Prince would come. And—my faith was justified!

After our marriage, Ramon and I settled in a charming home in Vedado, the exclusive residential section in Havana. A little son, with his father's glorious dark eyes, has come to complete our happiness.

My husband proves a delightful companion, and I do not think he will ever cease being the lover. For my part, I intend to always keep myself interesting and dainty. He shall not find romance lacking at home!

In the evenings, we sit on the wide balcony which overlooks the sea. Overhead, a myriad stars are shining, and there is the music of the waves gently washing against the shore. We enjoy together the glamour of tropic nights. In spirit, as in flesh, we are truly one. To few is given the rare joy of such exquisite companionship. Most certainly, the gods have been good to me, and here's hoping that every little Cinderella who reads this story may have her Fairy Prince.